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FEB.

THE saint MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Adventure of the Broken Arrow
by AUGUST DERLETH

Death in the Night
by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

The Sixty-eighth Husband
by WENZELL BROWN

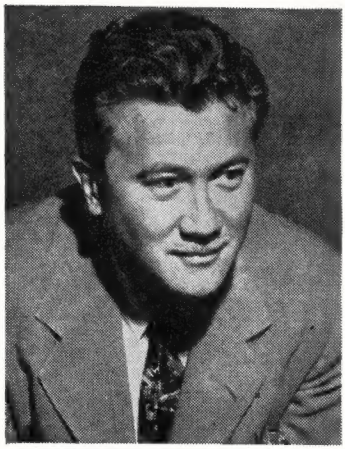
The Murder of King Abdullah
by GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT

The Men of the Jimmy
by MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

The Intemperate Reformer

A NEW STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION



The management that launched THE SAINT used to bring out simultaneously a sort of companion magazine of science fiction, FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, which became an early casualty under the administration which got hold of both properties for a while. I was sorry to see it go down, for I am quite an addict of that kind of escape myself, and this was a particularly intelligent and entertaining periodical of its genre.

Hans Stefan Santesson, who of course edited that publication too, has suggested to me that a science-fiction or futuristic mystery story might be a legitimate, interesting, and unusual feature of THE SAINT's contents at frequent if not regular intervals. And I was sold at once.

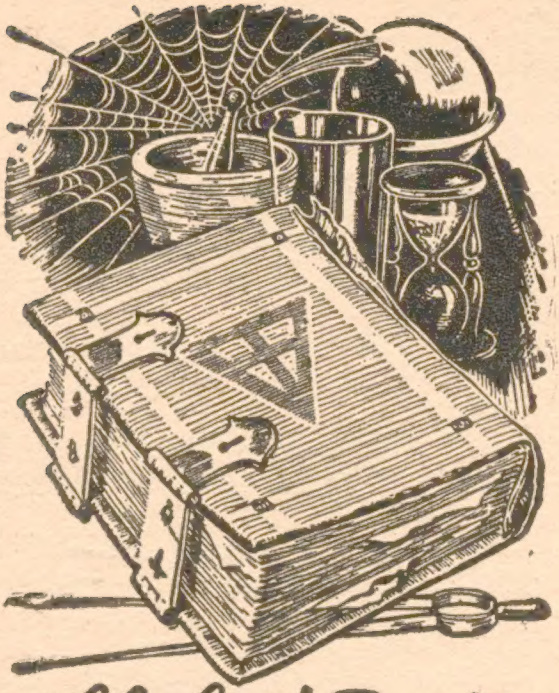
After all, why not? Readers are still enjoying "period" (meaning period-in-the-past) detective stories, not all of which were written by authors like Conan Doyle for whom those periods were contemporary. I might mention for instance the Holmesian *pastiches* of our popular contributor August Derleth, and the historical mystery novels in which John Dickson Carr has combined great scholarship and research with his own incomparable flair for the baffling puzzle and unpredictable solution. Why, then, should not mysteries laid in a period-in-the-future, or even on another planet, be equally valid variants on the detective theme?

Only one objection has occurred to me: the danger of the reader being cheated of his fair and proper chance to forestall the author or outguess the detective by the easy introduction of some fantastic gimmick which sneaks around the coordinates in which he has been thinking. He would have, of course, every right to feel swindled if the solution to the locked-room problem turns out to be that the villain can dematerialize himself and walk through inter-atomic holes in a wall, or the Venusian private eye disarms the murder gang by breathing on them after a meal of *cilrag,* a potent Venusian bulb which grows backwards.

Such facile frauds as those, you can be sure, would never get past Santesson or myself. We promise that all the accepted rules of the game will be observed, whether in 2061 or Alpha Centauri. And we think we can produce some stimulating experiments.

Leslie Charteris

Secrets entrusted to a few



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Leslie Charteris
Supervising Editor

Hans Stefan Santesson
Editor

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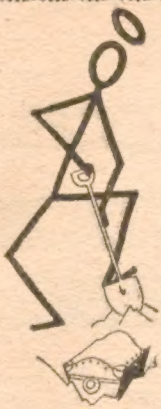

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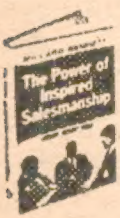

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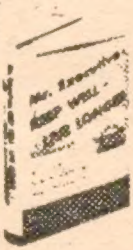

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the intemperate reformer

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Framing may not always be dirty work. It depends on how you see the picture . . .

SIMON TEMPLAR watched with a remorselessly calculating eye the quantity of caviar that was being spooned onto his plate, with the eternal-springing hope that this would intimidate the head waiter into serving a more than normally generous portion, and said: "If I had to answer such a silly question as why I want to be rich, I'd say it was so I could afford to eat those unhatched sturgeon twice a day. There must be some moral in the thought that they're considered the national delicacy of Russia, the self-styled protector of the under-privileged."

He waved away the tray of minced onion and chopped whites and yolks of eggs proffered by a lesser servitor, and signalled the wine steward who waited near by with a frosted bottle.

"Romanoff caviar and Romanoff vodka—what a wonderful proletarian combination!"

"I always did like your ideas of the simple life," said Monty Hayward comfortably.

The Saint piled a small mound of black grains on a thin slice of brown toast, tasted it reverently, and raised his glass.

"I read somewhere that the scientists have discovered a rare vitamin

---

THOAT WAS NOT THE FIRST, AND WOULD NOT BE THE LAST, TO DISCOVER HOW DANGEROUS IT COULD BE TO PICK ON A FRIEND OF THE SAINT.

---

in caviar which greatly increases the human system's ability to stand up to alcohol—I'm not kidding," he remarked. "I suppose the Russians, who always claim to have discovered everything, would say that they knew this all along. That's why they put away so much of this stuff at their banquets. Well, don't quote me to the FBI, but I prefer this to the American excuse for vodka-tippling."

"And what's that?" Monty asked unguardedly.

"The sales pitch that it doesn't change the flavor of whatever slop you dilute it with; and that it doesn't taint your breath—so that if you wreck a few cars on the way home, and you can still stand up, the cops presumably won't dream you've been drinking. This may be predicated on the erroneous assumption that cops can't read advertisements, too, but I suppose it gives some people confidence. I shall let you drive us home, Monty. *Na zdorovye!*"

"Here's to crime," Monty said.

Simon regarded him affectionately.

They were dining at the East Arms at Hurley, a one-time English country pub which was its own sufficient answer to some of the old traditional gibes at British gastronomical facilities, and it was their first reunion in many years. It was a very far cry from the days when Monty Hayward had sometimes found himself involved in the fringes of the Saint's lawless activities, and in particular had been embroiled in one incredible adventure which had whirled them across Austria and Bavaria in a fantastic flight that may still be remembered by senior students of these chronicles.

"It's been a long time, Monty," said the Saint. "And now you're a Director of the Consolidated Press, with an expense account and a chauffeured limousine and all the trimmings, and you wouldn't get mixed up in any of my shenanigans for anything. Don't you ever get tired of this awful respectability?"

"Never," declared Monty firmly. "It's too nice to be able to look a policeman in the eye."

"I never saw one with such beautiful eyes, myself," said the Saint.

"I ran into another reformed friend of yours the other day, incidentally. I'd been to Cambridge with the Chairman about one of our scholarship projects, and on the way back in the evening we felt thirsty. We were going through a little village called Listend, which you won't even find on most maps, but it's just off the main road not far from Hertford, and we spotted a very quaint pub called the Golden Stag, so we stopped there. And who do you think was standing there behind the bar?"

"I'll try one guess. Gypsy Rose Lee."

"Sam Outrell—the fellow you had for a janitor when you lived at Cornwall House."

The Saint's face lighted up.

"Good old Sam! I've often wondered what happened to him."

"Well, he always said he was a country boy, you remember; and I suppose all those years of tipping you off when Inspector Teal was waiting in the lobby to see you, and inventing alibis for you when you weren't there, must have convinced him that the city life was too strenuous for the likes of him. So after he'd earned his pension, he took his savings and bought this pub."

"That's wonderful. How's he doing?"

"Not too well, right now . . . He's run into a bit of trouble."

Some of the blue in the Saint's gaze seemed to gently change latitude, from Mediterranean to arctic.

"Has he? What kind?"

"He was caught selling drinks after hours—*and* to a minor, what's more. It looks pretty bad."

"What ever made him do a stupid thing like that? I mean, getting caught."

"He swears he didn't do it, it was a frame-up. But he doesn't think he's got a chance of beating it. He's expecting to lose his license."

"This is something that could only happen in Merrie England," said the Saint sulfurously. "I love this country; but the equating of morality with the precise hour at which somebody wants a drink is one refinement where they lost me. I am so depraved that I still admire the good sense of all those barbarous countries which cling to the primitive notion that a citizen should be entitled to a drink any time he can pay for it."

"Even a minor?"

"The kids take a glass of wine with the family in France, or beer in Germany, and I've never noticed that it seemed to do them any harm. Personally, I'd say it was a lot better for them than the soda-pop-slop they swill by the gallon in America, and that's already infiltrated here."

"Well, the chap that Sam swears he was shopped by wouldn't agree with you," Monty said. "Particularly since he's apparently got an interest in one of those soda-pop-slop factories, as you call 'em."

"This may ruin a beautiful dinner," Simon said grimly. "And the chicken pie here, which I ordered for us, is merely the best in England. But at the risk of acute indigestion, I must hear more about this ineffable excrescence."

"His name," Monty said reluctantly, "is Isaiah Thoat."

"I can hardly believe it," said the Saint, rubbing his hands together ecstatically. "But do go on."

If Mr. Isaiah Thoat's ears had begun to burn at this juncture, they would actually have added little luminosity to his complexion, in spite of their impressive size, for his facial capillaries had already endowed him with the rosy coloration which is popularly believed to be engendered by over-indulgence in ferments and distillates. It was an

incongruous tint for his mournful cast of countenance, and attained its zenith of infelicity at the end of his long nose, which was positively purple. The combination, with his unfortunately rheumy eyes and the somber clothes which he preferred, made him look like a bibulous undertaker. This was a cruel injustice, for he had never tasted anything even as potent as lager beer, and the only burial he aspired to supervise was that of the allegorical figure personified as John Barleycorn.

Even Mr. Thoat's bitterest opponents, who were legion, had never found grounds for questioning his sincerity. But it could be claimed with equal truth that the Emperor Nero, the directors of the Spanish Inquisition, and the hierarchy of the Nazi Party were also sincere, according to their lights. And Isaiah Thoat would not have had to take second place to any of them for the fanaticism with which he was prepared to persecute dissenters from his dogma that liquor was the root of all evil.

"There he stood, Mr. Templar," said Sam Outrell, "right where you are, an' no witnesses, of course, an' sez: 'Between you an' me, I'd borrow the devil's own pitchfork if I could use it to help toss some of you traders in Satan's poison into his own Hades.' "

"And he used his own daughter to coax a drink out of you?" Simon asked.

"As true as I'm standin' here, so help me. I wouldn't have no cause to lie to you, sir, you know that, much as I've done it *for* you in the old days. She's just as 'omely as he is, what you'd expect, with that breeding, an' it makes her look a lot older. But I didn't have the foggiest who she was, an' I fell for the whole swindle like a ton o' bricks."

"What did she do?"

"It's closing time, an' she's about the last customer left, an' she sez she feels faint. Now, she ain't had nothing to account for that, I know, 'cause I served her meself all evening, an' all she drank was that Sanitade stuff her father makes—though I didn't know then he was her father. So I gets everybody else out, while the wife is fussin' over her, an' this young woman sez 'Could I have a sip of brandy?' "

"She asked for it herself?"

"Oh, yes—very weak like, as if she might die any minute. Well, sir, what would *you* do?"

Simon nodded in anticipation.

"And as soon as you gave it to her, the door opens—"

"Which I'd bin too bothered to lock up, an' there's a bobby comin' in. 'I seen you through the window,' he sez, 'selling this girl a drink.'

" 'She's a friend of ours an' a guest in the house,' I sez, knowin' the Law. 'We didn't sell her nothing, we gave it to her.'

"Right away she ain't faintin' no more, but sittin' up as fine as you please, an' she sez 'That's a lie,' she

sez, 'I bought and paid for it.' An' there she's pointin' to a half-crown on the bar which she must 've put down while we were talkin'. I ask you, sir, what chance did I have?"

The Saint took a sympathetically thoughtful swig from his tankard.

"Did you tell all this to the Beak?"

"Of course I did. An' he sez he has a mind to send me to jail for perjury. Because this girl, which ain't what I'd like to call her, is there in court with her father, Mr. Thoat, an' he backs her up."

"They were in it together?"

"It looks like it. 'She's a wayward girl and a cross I have to bear, your Honour,' he sez. 'In spite of all I've done, this craving for the devil's brew comes over her. That's why I asked the constable to keep an eye out for her. It only takes an opportunity like this despicable publican gave her,' he sez, 'to undo all my loving care. I ask your Honour to make an example of him.' "

"And he did?"

"This magistrate is a teetotaler himself, an' a real holy terror. He fines me a hundred quid, an' sez he'll consider havin' my license taken away. I don't think I've got an earthly, Mr. Templar."

Outrell looked around the low-ceilinged room with its age-blackened beams and yellowed plaster, the honestly worn chairs and tables of uncertain vintage, the bare floor eroded in ancient contours compounded of the vagaries of its own wood grain and the most-used routes between bar and bench and dart-board, all exposed in their nakedest simplicity by the bright morning light that streamed through the leaded windows; and his big hands tightened into stolid pain-enduring fists. It was just after opening time, and there were no other customers to listen or interrupt.

"This is all I ever wanted, sir. Even when I went to work in London, to earn more money for bringing up the kids than I could as a farm hand. A place like this to put what was left of our savings in, where the wife an' me could make enough to get along without being a burden to anyone includin' the other taxpayers, an' we could have good company every day, with the kind o' plain country people we like. Thank God the old English country pub is still goin' strong. Mr. Templar, in spite of Mr. Thoat an' his Sanitade. It's as English as the changin' of the Guard, or the Derby, or them orators in Hyde Park: it's the little man's club an' debating society an' a place to get away from the missus when she's actin' up without gettin' into no real trouble, where he can have his mug o' beer an' good company an' not get hurt or hurt nobody. I thought I could be a good publican, though he sez it as if it was a rude word. . . . It hurts, Mr. Templar, but p'raps after all I wasn't cut out for it. It hurts; but me an' the wife are

readin' the advertisements, lookin' for something else. We might have to take a little tobacco an' sweet shop, something like that, somewhere. But it won't be the same."

"Have you any idea why they picked on you?"

"I suppose that's not hard to see, if you make yourself think like he does. His Sanitade company bought all the land next to me, from here to the main road, for their new Garden Factory. You must 've noticed the foundations goin' in when you drove up. That's it. He thinks it'd be terrible to have a common pub right next to the plant where his Angels of Abstinence Association are mixin' up their swill—not to mention the danger to his precious workers who might be tempted to drop in here for a quick one at lunch time or on the way home. He tried to get me to sell, when I moved in here, that time I started off tellin' you about; an' when I said I was goin' to stay, an' couldn't we live an' let live, that's when he swore he'd get me out whatever it took. But what's the use o' tellin' that to a magistrate, especially one like that one? He's against you from the start, an' anything you say is just tryin' to wriggle out of a conviction. I know when I ain't got a chance."

"You're putting me in the hell of a spot, Sam," said the Saint. All these years I've had a dim hope that Prohibition might really take over in England, and then we could all become bootleggers and get rich. But if this front man for the Cause has to be mowed down, for your sake, I'll see what can be done. Don't give up yet."

He went back to London to make some inquiries of his own, of which the most delicate concerned the constable who had played an essential part in the conviction of Sam Outrell. Obtaining the police records of policemen is about as ticklish an assignment as any outsider can undertake, especially when he is as traditionally *non grata* in police circles as the Saint, and when it might later become vital that nobody should recall that he had been inquiring about the officer in question.

There is however a section in the War Office which can request such information without having to give reasons, and which at certain periods has gratefully accepted the services of even more irregular characters than the Saint. There was a gray Colonel still there who had not forgotten an obligation incurred during the days of the Swastika, who called the Saint back very promptly and without any fuss.

"There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with him except that he may be a bit too ambitious. He put in for the Scotland Yard training school, but he failed the written examination and went back to the Hertford constabulary. He's entered for another try next year. They give him good marks locally

except for taking himself too seriously and trying to get ahead too fast."

The supplementary data on Isaiah Thoat were much easier to get, being mostly matters of public record. A former lay preacher, food faddist, pacifist, and anti-vivisectionist, he had finally settled on *spiritus frumenti* as the ideal lifelong adversary, and in that cause had formed and dedicated and made himself President of the Angels of Abstinence Association. But unlike the creators of many similar organizations, Mr. Thoat had a hard head as well as a chip on his shoulders, and he had learned from other efforts to divert the human race from doom and damnation that Mammon is a powerful ally in righteous as well as unrighteous persuasion, and that the Righteous are often uncomfortably short of this assistance. Therefore he had arranged for the subscriptions, donations, and other funds picked up by the Angels of Abstinence to be funnelled into the manufacture and marketing of a potion that they could all themselves enjoy without fear of devine or digestive retribution, which they could personally propagandize wherever they went with the comforting assurance that no souls would be even superficially scorched, but that the coffers of salvation would be enriched by every sip.

Thus was born Sanitade, a nectar loosely based on a chocolated broth which Mr. Thoat's mother had made for him when he broke out in teen-age pimples, fortified with fruit juices chosen for their vitamin content, this horrendous concoction being well pasteurized, carbonated, and sealed in non-returnable bottles. The cachet of manufacture by the Angels of Abstinence gave it the same sort of distinction as is enjoyed, in the opposing camp, by the liqueur brewed by the Benedictine monks, and practically forced its acceptance and indorsement by all other groups dedicated to the same tenets as the Angels even under different management. It had thus become almost the official potion of all dry crusaders, and from them had spread to the membership of many equally zealous if less monophobic organizations, until Mr. Thoat could congratulate himself on having been rewarded with quite a thriving business for his battle against those other beverages which, he maintained, also fuelled the fires of Hell, causing them to burn with a blue flame.

"We must do something about him, Monty," Simon Templar said at another encounter.

"Why?" Monty argued. "Live and let live. Let him enjoy preaching prohibition and let's us enjoy our drinks. Then everybody's happy."

"Except Sam."

"He might do better selling cigarettes and gum drops, after all. The country-pub business isn't what it

used to be when you and I were a bit younger, anyway. And if you want to start that Robin Hood stuff again, you should do it on something important. There are still people smuggling dope into this country, for instance. It was in the papers only yesterday that Scotland Yard is baffled—"

"Maybe I'll help them with that, too," said the Saint. "As soon as I can spare the time. But, Monty, have you ever tasted Sanitade?"

"No; and I don't want to. I have a rather sensitive stomach—"

"I understand that. It *looks* sensitive, since you became an Editorial Director. So you should have more sympathy for other people who are being afflicted. It's almost a sacred duty to get that swill off the market. And if we can strike a blow against crackpots and help Sam at the same time, wouldn't it make you feel young again?"

The old hypnotic devilment danced in the Saint's blue eyes, and Monty Hayward groaned. "It makes me wish I'd had the sense to keep my mouth shut." he said.

No such rueful presentiment clouded the horizon of Mr. Isaiah Thoat as he watched the first rather unceremonious activation of the Sanitade Garden Plant—that would be a better name than "Factory", he was thinking, and fitted the "Garden" motif so nicely.

The activation in fact consisted only of the delivery of a truck-load of cacao to an old but well-built barn which had been the only edifice on the plant site when he acquired it, which he had thriftily decided to preserve and use for miscellaneous storage. Though the new buildings were barely starting to rise from their footings, his shrewdness was already being vindicated: he had had the chance to pick up this consignment of essential raw material at a giveaway price, but would have had to turn it down if he had been limited to the storage facilities of the outgrown original Sanitade Factory which he was preparing to replace.

"You see, my dear Selina," he observed to his daughter, who was with him, "Fortune does not only aid the wicked. Good luck is usually the reward of good judgment."

"And you deserve all that you get, Papa," she said.

She was one of those unlucky young females who seem to have been created solely to boost the morale of their nearest competitors. Beside her, no other creature in a skirt could have felt hopeless. It might be kinder not to detail her specifications, but simply to say that for every apparently ultimate disaster in feminine architecture there must be something worse; and she was it.

Mr. Thoat signed the driver's receipt and himself closed and locked the barn doors. He was just completing this when County Constable George Yelland rode by on his bicycle, and stopped.

"Good morning, sir—and Miss Selina," said the young man, saluting smartly. "I see that you're moving in already, in quite a big way."

"Good morning, officer," said Mr. Thoat agreeably. "But what gave you the idea—"

"A large lorry has just stopped here, sir," said the constable airily. "The tracks are quite plain, where it pulled in, and considerably lighter where it pulled out. Therefore, it discharged quite a load. It rained this morning from 5.10 a.m. until 7.35. The tracks were made since the rain, and since I find you here locking the door I conclude that the delivery has just taken place."

"Excellent," said Mr. Thoat. "I only wish that some of those vulgar popular writers who seem to take such a delight in deriding the British police could be forced to observe you on your rounds. I shall write another letter to the Chief Constable about you—you *are* the young officer who took such good care of my daughter recently, aren't you?"

He had not noticed that his offspring had returned the constable's greeting with the swooning adoration of a dyspeptic sheep.

"Yes, Mr. Thoat, I had that privilege. . . . But what I'm concerned about now is whether it's wise for you to leave anything valuable in this barn. I've noticed the contractor doesn't keep a night watchman here."

"I declined to underwrite that expense," Mr. Thoat said primly. "It's up to him to see that there aren't so many materials left lying around that it's worth some professional loafer's wages just to protect them from petty pilfering."

"Yes, sir; but building jobs do catch the eye of a certain type of petty thief, and then a building like this barn becomes a sort of attraction, out here in the middle of nowhere, so to speak, where nobody would be likely to hear anyone breaking in."

"Then I shall rely on you to keep an especially sharp watch on it, Constable—"

"Yelland, sir."

"Ah, yes. I must remember that name, so that your services will be properly credited by the Authorities if my property is protected—or vice versa. I'm sure we are leaving everything in good hands—are we not, Selina?"

"Yes, indeed, Papa," said Selina, with more than dutiful ardor.

Mr. Thoat consulted his watch.

"I must be going, or I shall be late for my appointment in town. That wretched plumber should have been here an hour ago. Now he'll just have to come back another time."

"I could wait for him, Papa, and go back on the bus. I can tell him what you decided about the washrooms."

"An excellent idea. And be sure he understands that I refuse to pay extra for such frivolities as colored tiles."

Mr. Thoat drove himself back to London—he had a nine-year-old car which he never propelled beyond 20 miles an hour, thereby having caused several accidents to happen to other drivers who had been goaded to recklessness by the sheer exasperation of dragging behind him. But he had allowed plenty of time for his customary average, and arrived at the modest South Kensington tea-shoppe where he had made his luncheon rendezvous a few minutes before his guest, who had dallied until the last moment at the nearest tavern, taking prophylaxis against the aridity of the impending meal.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, Mr. Thoat."

"Not at all, Mr. Tombs, I was early," Mr. Thoat said generously.

He took out his wallet, extracted from it a neatly written check, and passed it across the table.

Simon Templar took it, verified the amounts, and put it away in his own billfold with equal gravity. He was wearing an oldfashioned double-breasted suit and tie of almost canonical drabness, and only the most assiduous students of his techniques of disguise would have recognized him. With a heavy powdering of white in the hair, the roughed-up eyebrows, and the untidy false mustache, behind an eyeshield of tinted glasses, and bowed in a concave-chested slouch, there was little to recall the dynamic exuberance that he wore like a halo when he chose to live up to more appropriate names than Tombs.

"The delivery was all right, then, was it, Mr. Thoat?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Tombs. Perfectly correct. I hope you aren't offended by my reserving payment until it was completed; but after all, in making such a purchase from a total stranger, at so much below the current market price—"

"Don't think any more about it, Mr. Thoat. I understand. Of course I'm losing money. But I'm helping a good cause. And I can take the loss off my income tax. That makes it about the same as a donation, doesn't it?"

"Yes, certainly, but—"

"But I can't go on selling to you at a loss, Mr. Thoat. I'm supposed to make my living in the commodity market. The Government would begin to get suspicious. I have been looking for another approach."

"Do you gennelmun wanta order?" inquired an impatient waitress, leaning over with a threatening notebook.

The menu offered the grisly alternatives of boiled sausages, fricassée of veal, or a Health Salad compounded of raw vegetables, fruits, and nuts. It was obvious which of these delicacies Mr. Thoat would order. Simon settled for the boiled sausages, steeling himself against Mr. Thoat's slightly pained expression, with a placating bottle of Sanitade, and hoped that he

would be able to get it down without a visible shudder.

"I'm not a capitalist, Mr. Thoat—the income tax system has seen to that," he resumed. "But I do receive the income from a trust fund set up by my late father, which I don't really need. Since he accumulated this money by putting aside and investing each year the amount which he estimated he would have spent on drink if he had been a drinker, I think he would approve of my passing it on to help you in your wonderful work."

"It would certainly be well employed," said Mr. Thoat, a trifle shakily. "And I'm flattered that you should have chosen me, out of all the possible—"

"That was not flattery, or a random selection, Mr. Thoat. Frankly, I have investigated several deserving organizations of the same type as yours. What impressed me, as a business man, about the Angels of Abstinence, is that they are run on a practical businesslike basis which actively aids and in no way compromises their idealistic objectives. I understand that you alone are responsible for this. That makes you the man for me. To get the most out of the income I am talking about calls for a business man as well as a crusader. It amounts to about sixteen thousand pounds a year."

Mr. Thoat somehow managed not to choke on the first mouthful of shredded fodder which had just been set before him.

"I think I shall be able to justify your confidence, Mr. Tombs."

"There are, of course, a few conditions."

"Of what kind?"

"Purely technical, in your case; but I feel I must pass them on to you, since they're the same as the ones which the trust imposes on me. What they amount to is that your life must be absolutely blameless, even above suspicion. That you must never be convicted of an offense against public decorum, of riotous behavior, scandalous conduct, criminal associations, drunkenness or even having taken a drink—all that sort of thing. It's all in the deed which I've told my lawyer to draw up."

"I hardly think that will be any problem," said Mr. Thoat, with a certain indulgent smugness.

"I'm sure it won't—but in the fantastic event that any such thing should occur, all payments would automatically stop, or never start. We have to take that precaution, the lawyers tell me. Then you will have to give a few simple undertakings on how the money will *not* be spent—such as advertising in periodicals which also accept liquor advertising, you know the sort of thing . . ."

They talked of this and kindred matters for the rest of the meal—if that word can be applied to the ingestion of such provender as they had been served.

"I hope we can meet and sign

this deed the day after tomorrow," Simon said finally.

"The day after tomorrow?" Mr. Thoat's eyebrows went up remonstratively. "But that's Sunday!"

"I know. But I had enough trouble getting my lawyer to work tomorrow to get it done. And I hardly think that signing a couple of papers like these would be called working on the Lord's Day. Unfortunately I have to be in New York on business the first thing Monday morning—I'm taking a plane at midnight Sunday. I'd like to have this done before I leave. Just in case of accidents, you know."

Mr. Thoat nodded. The prospect of Mr. Sebastian Tombs being jet-propelled to his eternal rest by some mechanical malfunction in mid-Atlantic, with this munificent endowment uncompleted, gave him a cold shiver.

"I understand. But as I think I've mentioned, this Sunday is rather a busy day for me."

Simon knew that, too. There was about to break out in London another of those International Conventions with which every major city must periodically be afflicted; only this was not the type which has consolations for saloon-keepers, night club impresarios, and ladies of flexible morality, like the average run of these jamborees, being billed as a World Temperance Congress of groups whose avowed objective was the ruin of all such iniquitous entrepreneurs. It was to be launched that Sunday by a grand parade of delegates from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square, intended to dramatize the fact of their presence in town and to draw expectant attention to the week of speech-making and resolution-adopting which was to follow, during which some of the world's most talented firebrands would denounce assorted forms of fun with all the hyperbolic savagery and violence to be expected of proper advocates of temperance.

"The parade is supposed to start at two-thirty, isnt it?" said the Saint. "I know that nothing would stop you leading the Angels of Abstinence yourself; but surely you could get away for lunch? My apartment is just off Park Lane, only two minutes from the park. If you could be there at one, I'll have a nice salad waiting, and promise to get you back with ten minutes to spare."

Mr. Thoat pursed his lips.

"Yes, I suppose I could manage that. It seems to be the only way."

"Splendid! I'll have the papers and everything ready. Now I must run—I have another appointment which just won't wait."

This was literally true, the appointment being dictated by the still unrevised licensing laws of England, which in a few minutes would ruthlessly compel the pub around the corner to close for the afternoon, thus making it impossible to satisfactorily wash away the

taste of the boiled sausages and Sanitade which Simon Templar had been unable to finish. But he left Mr. Thoat in an obliviously happy daze through which even the fact that the bill for their deplorable repast still remained to be paid did not penetrate until too late.

Mr. Thoat had already relegated the transaction through which the beneficent Sebastian Tombs had introduced himself to the category of past business; but it was not so easily filed away by County Constable George Yelland, who had lingered on at the barn after Mr. Thoat took his sedate departure.

"What exactly are you keeping here?" asked the earnest young officer.

"Cocoa beans," said Selina Thoat airily.

"Oh. I suppose they're not really too valuable to leave here."

"Not unless somebody stole all of them. That would come to quite a lot. Papa got these at a bargain. Are you married?"

Constable Yelland managed not to jump.

"No, miss."

"There's a dance in Hertford tomorrow tonight. I wish I could go."

"I hadn't heard about it."

"I wish you could take me."

"I don't think your father would approve of that, miss."

"Papa will be busy in London, with a welcoming dinner for some of our people. But he could do a lot for you—putting in a word about you in the right places—if I asked him to."

"Thank you, miss. But I'm afraid I'm on duty Saturday night. It's always a busy time."

"I could help you, too. Like I did that night at the Golden Stag."

Constable Yelland tried to ignore a sensation of extraordinary discomfort.

"I hope you didn't do anything beyond your duty to tell the truth, miss. Now if you'll excuse me, I've got a lot of miles to cover on this round . . ."

She watched him thoughtfully as he mounted his bicycle and pedalled away.

George Yelland, however, as an aspirant to the higher honors of the CID, was not the kind of policeman to remove a thought from his mind, once it had entered it, as efficiently as he had been taught to remove his person from unprofessional situations. The responsibility of Mr. Thoat's barn stayed with him, accentuated by a vaguely unsatisfied query about its contents, which caused him to keep it under even closer surveillance than was called for by simple self-interest.

He made a particular point of passing by several times the next day, since the workmen were observing the union Sabbath; and it was in the afternoon that he discovered a car parked off the road where the builder's trucks had furrowed an entrance, and a man

studying the barn with a kind of interest that could be definitely described as calculating.

This was no insignificant tribute to the histrionic ability of Monty Hayward, who on the Saint's instructions had been trying to maintain that effect for more than an hour before the constable arrived.

"May I ask what you're doing here?" Yelland said, as the book prescribed.

"Casing the joint."

"May I have your name, sir?"

The "sir" was another sort of tribute, not so much to Monty's air of confidence as to his distinctly unburglarlike appearance. Monty produced a card which gave his address with the Consolidated Press but made no mention of his status as a director—apart from a genuine natural modesty which he did his best to conceal, it still amused him at times to play at being an ordinary reporter again, a game which those unostentatious cards made perpetually possible.

"Now that I've identified myself," Monty said amiably, "What's *your* name?"

"Yelland, sir."

"Yelland? Where have I heard that name recently? . . . Oh, yes. You're the Robert who raided the pub down the road, and caught 'em selling a drink after hours to the young daughter of the chap who's building this factory."

"It wasn't exactly a raid, sir. Mr. Thoat asked me to keep an eye on his daughter, and it's my duty to look out for violations of the law."

"Of course. But didn't you think there was something a bit fishy about that conviction?"

Constable Yelland had another of those remotely unsettling qualms which had afflicted him since the previous morning.

"That isn't for me to say, sir. I only gave evidence as to what I saw and heard with my own eyes and ears. It's the magistrate who makes the conviction."

"Oh, come off it, Robert!"

"The name is George, sir."

"All right, Robert George. You've got opinions of your own, haven't you?"

"It's against regulations for me to discuss the decision of a court in which I have been a witness, sir," said the constable, taking refuge in asperity from his own uncertainty. "And anyhow, what are you so interested about?"

Monty Hayward grinned, and brought out a pipe and tobacco-pouch which he began to work together with a disarming assurance which he had practised in some considerably more risky situations than this one.

"Suppose I was doing an article on Mr. Thoat," he said. "I'd be interested in a lot of things. Not just that business about his daughter, though that might come into it. But about what's going on here, too. For instance, do you know what he's got in this barn?"

"Yes. Cocoa."

"Ah."

"What do you mean, Ah?"

"I only mean that items like that sometimes make headlines."

"I don't see what's a headline in that."

"Do you know where he got this cocoa?"

"No, sir. Only that it was a bargain."

"He told you that, did he?"

"His daughter did."

"That was careless of her."

"Look here, sir," Yelland said, with increasing impatience, "if you know something that I ought to know, it's your duty to tell me, not tease me with it."

"I don't definitely know anything," Monty replied. "Not yet. Suspicions aren't evidence, as you know. But I am investigating what sounded like a rather hot tip—"

"Where did it come from?"

Monty gave a reproachful look.

"Now, officer, you know very well that no reporter would give away the source of some kinds of information, and even a judge couldn't force him to. I can only tell you that it came from an acquaintance of mine who isn't always on good terms with the police, but who usually knows what he's talking about. I've got a few more inquiries to make here and there, and if they confirm each other there may be an interesting arrest. Would you like to make an interesting arrest?"

The spontaneous gleam in the young policeman's eye was replaced almost instantly by a dampening recognition of fact.

"I'm not in the CID yet, sir."

"But you'd like to be, wouldn't you? You're a lot smarter than a lot of chaps on a beat, I've noticed that. I wish I *could* give you a—"

Suddenly Monty Hayward froze, staring fixedly, one hand extending with his pipe pointing in the direction of the stare.

"Robert George, do you see that?"

"What, sir?"

"That piece of paper, just sticking out from under the barn door! Go and get it. This may save us all the trouble of applying for a search warrant!"

Constable Yelland perplexedly retrieved the fragment. It appeared to be the corner of a label, but the only printing that could be read on it was the words: LATROPIC IMPORT COMPANY, CUTTS LANE, STEPNEY.

"Cocoa is a tropical product," Monty said. "I think we can assume that that label came from some of the stuff that was delivered here."

"Very likely, sir. But I still don't see—"

"Of course not. But you will . . . Hang on to the clue, officer. And let me know where you can be reached tomorrow morning, especially if you're off duty. I'll pass the tip on to you before anyone else, if it turns out to be a sound one, and

you can make the most of it. Meanwhile, mum's the word."

Constable Yelland found himself left in a dreamy cloud not entirely unlike the one which had befogged Mr. Thoat when Simon Templar took leave of him the day before. Which was not a fantastic coincidence, since the technique for creating both befuddlements had originated in the same disgracefully handsome head.

"A very nice job, Monty," said the Saint, when he had listened to an almost verbatim report. "I don't think you missed a trick. With a little more practice and a few less suburban scruples, you could soon be the perfect partner in crime again."

"Thanks very much," Monty said. "But I never was. This was an easy job, and it can't get me into any trouble, whatever happens. I can still hide behind the Consolidated Press and the professional secrecy excuse. But when I think what it would be like if we'd been caught breaking into that Latropic warehouse, I wonder if I was ever qualified to be a company director."

"Lots of them have ended up in jail," Simon pointed out reassuringly. "But I'd 've got you out of it somehow. Didn't I always?"

"Like you did in that business about Prince Rudolf and his crown jewels. Yes; but my aging nerves can't take so much any more. And suppose Young Sherlock identifies me as the driver of the truck that delivered that cocoa yesterday?"

The Saint laughed at him shamelessly.

"He never saw you. And Isaiah never looked at you twice—you said that yourself. And anyhow, I made you up and messed you up until even I wondered what you really looked like. And I stole the truck myself while you were in a board meeting with some of the best alibis on Fleet Street. Now will you stop worrying long enough to work out the timing for tomorrow?"

"It seems to me that our timing's a bit off already. I've been watching for a report on that Latropic robbery, and there still doesn't seem to have been one."

"Because their warehouse isn't opened every day, only when shipments are coming in or going out. We did a nice quiet job that didn't attract any attention in the neighborhood, and obviously they didn't have any reason to go to the place on Friday. That's the first thing to take care of. You just use your reporter's immunity again, call the head man at home and say you've heard through the underworld grapevine that his storehouse was cracked, and what does he know about it? If it hasn't been discovered yet, he'll soon find out. Then you see that it gets in the Sunday papers. Then tomorrow morning . . ."

At eight o'clock the next morn-

ing, George Yelland was just starting his breakfast and his Sunday paper simultaneously when his landlady called him to the telephone.

"This is the scoop I promised you, officer," Monty Hayward said, after identifying himself. "Have you seen a newspaper yet?"

"I was just starting it, sir."

"You'll find a report that the Latropic Import Company—remember that label?—had their warehouse broken into on Thursday night and a lorry load of cocoa beans stolen, but the theft wasn't discovered till yesterday afternoon, some time after I talked to you. Item two: if you check with Scotland Yard, you'll find that they have a report of a lorry being stolen from a garage on Thursday afternoon which was found abandoned at Highgate on Friday afternoon. You might find out about its tires, and have another look at the tracks at Thoat's barn. If you want to get credit for some fast thinking, you put that together with what Thoat's daughter told you and take it to your Inspector. You needn't bring me into it—tell him you figured it all out yourself. It should be good enough to take to any magistrate you can catch on his way to church, and get a search warrant for that barn."

"But, sir . . . Mr. Thoat—a receiver of stolen goods!" Yelland's voice almost choked on the enormity of the thought as well as its possible value to his record. "They'd laugh at me, and I wouldn't blame 'em!"

"The thieves knew just where to unload the stuff, didn't they, only a few hours after it was stolen? And there aren't so many people who could use all that cocoa. Didn't his daughter say it was a bargain? And where do you get some of the best bargains—if you don't ask any questions?"

"I know, sir, but—"

"Don't disappoint me, Robert," Monty insisted, and this time the constable was too spellbound to reprove him on the name. "I'm trying to do something for you, and all I want in return is that you'll see that the Consolidated Press gets the official news first. But if anyone goes on laughing at you, you suggest phoning the managing director of Latropic Import himself, and he'll tell you that they haven't sold or delivered that much cocoa to anyone, Mr. Thoat or anyone else, for more than a week. I'll give you his name and home address. Take this down . . ."

For Mr. Isaiah Thoat it was also destined to be a climactic day. After a chapel service at which he had been invited to read the First Lesson, a performance which always left him feeling that at least part of the mantle of some Old Testament prophet remained clinging to his shoulders, he had huddled with the captains of his Angels of Abstinence over last-minute parade ar-

rangements until he was only able to arrive an apologetic five minutes late at the address on Grosvenor Street which Simon Templar was using for that operation.

The apartment itself actually belonged to a stalwart pillar of the House of Lords, who stayed there only when Parliament was in session, and even then retreated every weekend to his estate in the Cotswolds, who would have been most surprised to know what unauthorized use was being made of it. But with the sole aid of this elementary knowledge of his Lordship's habits, and a certain persuasive skill with a lock, the mythical personality of Sebastian Tombs had been provided for the brief necessary time with a physical abode which could not possibly be linked to Simon Templar by any thread of proof.

"Come in, come in," said the Saint heartily, brushing off Mr. Thoat's excuses on the threshold. "I know it must have been hard for you to get away."

"I took the liberty of bringing my daughter, Selina," Mr. Thoat said, disclosing her as he entered.

"Delighted," said the Saint, without flinching. "She can help with the salad. I'm all alone here—I don't approve of making a servant work on Sunday, even for a special occasion. But I think we can look after ourselves. I was just experimenting with something I thought of yesterday—a Sanitade cocktail. I know Sanitade is wonderful by itself, but people like to mix things, it makes them feel smart and creative. Might be another sales angle for you. Here, try it."

He poured from a silver cocktail shaker. Mr. Throat and Selina tasted, and tasted again.

"It's very good," Mr. Thoat said politely.

"Just some Angostura, ginger, peppermint, and a couple of other things," said the Saint. "I'll send you the recipe when it's perfected, and perhaps a few others. You could put out a little booklet. There's nothing wrong about fighting the Devil with his own weapons, is there? And I think this mixture has quite a refreshing tang for a hot day."

Mr. Thoat and Selina drank some more. It was a hot day.

"Very good indeed," Mr. Thoat said.

His tone was a little less perfunctory, a little warmer. The combination certainly seemed to do something. Although it obscured the pure flavor of Sanitade, which to him was delicious, it indeed had a zest which developed like a sort of delayed deeper echo to the first impact on the palate.

"I haven't forgotten our time limit," said the Saint. "So if your daughter *would* take over in the kitchen, we can get right down to business. Would you like to start reading the deed while I show her where everything is?"

It was an impressive document on which Simon had labored conscientiously for some hours, loading it with all the whereases and heretofores that his sense of legal jargon could supply, and typing it on a grade of paper only slightly less heavy than the stone tablets which its verbiage deserved. After stretching to the limit the details of periodicity of payment, it proceeded, as he had warned at their luncheon, to prohibit at great length a list of highly improbable ways in which the money could not be spent, such as financing disorderly houses or lewd publications. From there it went on to enumerate the even more fanciful covenants assumed by Isaiah Thoat, who personally undertook to eschew such practices as nudism, consorting with astrologers, or dancing in a ballet, on down to receiving stolen goods or being charged with drunkenness, upon the least of which breaches the whole deal was off.

All this was gone through, clause by clause, while Mr. Thoat had two more Sanitade cocktails and Simon took another one out to the kitchen.

"I know it sounds almost insulting," Simon said unhappily. "But that's the kind of man my father was. Don't take anything for granted, was one of his principles. Even I had to sign the same thing myself."

"I am not offended," said Mr. Thoat, with an almost benign superciliousness. "No man need be ashamed of reaffirming his principles. And with such a lot of money involved, you can't be coo tareful—I mean, too careful."

He scrawled his signature in the places provided, and handed the papers back with a grandiose flourish which almost upset his glass.

"Thish ish a great moment in my life," he announced. "The climaxsh of thirty yearsh of vedotion . . . Do you have a lil more of that tocktail?"

Simon figured that Mr. Thoat had already absorbed about four and a half ounces of vodka under the heading of the "couple of other things" in his concoction, and he did not want to overdo it.

"I've got something else, a Sanitade punch, to go with the salad," he said. "And I think we ought to be starting on it. I don't want to make you late."

Selina Thoat was bringing in the salad, and Simon went to the refrigerator for the punch. In this the motive power consisted of rum and gin, but in milder dilution with Sanitade and pineapple juice than the alcohol in the cocktail. Their necessary aroma was masked by liberal twists of orange peel, and the strength was carefully calculated to counteract the sobering effect of food and keep the consumer at the elevation he started at, without boosting him to a more dangerous altitude.

Mr. Thoat talked garrulously,

often boastfully, and with many stumbles of enunciation which sometimes seemed to puzzle him, about his past achievements and future projects; Simon made the essential minimum of admiring and encouraging noises to keep him going; and Selina spent most of the time staring at the Saint with bewilderedly enlarged and rapturous eyes while she chewed her cud, which gave her a disconcerting resemblance to a lovesick cow. A preposterously long time seemed to crawl by before a clock struck two and Simon could initiate the adjournment.

"I'll do the dishes," volunteered Selina, "while you and Papa wash your hands."

Simon tidied the dining-living-room, thankful that there had been no smoking to add its problems of telltale ashes and odors, and joined Selina in the kitchen while Mr. Thoat was completing the euphemistic lavage. He was glad to see that she had cleaned up as meticulously as her upbringing would have predicted—he only wanted to be sure that an inoffensive earl would find no trace of vandalism, and might even staunchly deny that anyone could have used his flat in the way that Mr. Thoat might subsequently claim that it had been used.

Selina Thoat, however, was ruminating a different idea.

"If your servant has the day off," she said, "would you like me to come back and cook dinner for you?"

"You're very kind," said the Saint. "But I'm having dinner with a business associate, who's taking me to the airport."

"When you come back, then. Any Sunday when you're alone. Just call me."

"Thank you," said the Saint, and was able to sound more grateful because Mr. Thoat returned at that moment. "But now you really must be going."

He herded them to the door, picking up the deeds from the coffee-table on the way.

"You won't want to have this stuff bulging out of your pockets in the parade," he said. "Let me mail you your copy."

"You are mos' conshidrate, Mr. Tombs," Mr. Thoat said portentously. He amplified the thought, with an air of inspiration: "You have cast your bread upon the warrers. It will come back to you in good measure, preshed down an' run over."

He essayed a courtly bow, lurched a little, and proceeded down the stairs with extreme precision.

The deputation of Angels of Abstinence was already marshalled in military formation when Mr. Thoat and Selina located them in the irregular column of demonstrators which blocked half the old Carriage Road on the east of Park Lane. While they waited for the

promenade to get under way, they were ringing the welkin with a song which Mr. Thoat himself had authored, to an accompaniment of drums, bazookas, and harmonicas played by the more talented members of the party:

"The little lambs so frisky,
"The birds who charm our ear,
"Have never tasted whisky,
"Or rum or gin or beer!"

Emotionally stirred to the depths of his soul by the familiar melody and the uplifting words, Mr. Thoat was moved as he approached to adopt the rôle of conductor, waving his arms with an ecstatic exuberance that could only have been surpassed by Leonard Bernstein. The fact that this change of balance almost made him trip over his own feet he attributed to the unevenness of the ground.

"There he is," said Constable Yelland excitedly, standing in the fringe of the spectators in his best Sunday suit, beside an older man in somewhat plainer clothes on which the brand of Sir Robert Peel was nevertheless almost legible.

"Him?" said the Scotland Yard man, half incredulously. "I thought he was one of the top teetotalers."

Isaiah Thoat, suffused with a delirious sense of power which he attributed to the encouraging smiles of his flock, led them more vehemently into another stanza:

"Let's raise no girls and boys on
"Such filthy things to drink!
"Let's seize this curséd poison
"And pour it down the sink!"

"Boom-boom-boo-rah," added Mr. Thoat, stamping his feet up and down in a martial manner; at which point the Scotland Yard man tapped him on the shoulder and presented himself with the time-honored introduction.

"And I have a warrant for your arrest on a charge of receiving stolen goods knowing the same to have been stolen. It is my duty to warn you—"

"Ridiclush," said Mr. Thoat, leaning on him heavily. "I'll report you to your shuprir offcer. Why, do you know, I've jus' bin incrusted with a trush fund. . . . lemme tell you . . ."

Simon Templar had followed at a very discreet distance, merely to make sure that nothing remediable went wrong with the situation on which he had toiled so honestly. But even at that range he was able to appreciate the extra bulge of Selina Thoat's bovine eyes as she recognized Constable Yelland even in his horrible tailoring, and flung her arms around his neck.

"My dream man," she moaned.

The standard-bearer of Scotland Yard was sniffing Isaiah Thoat at almost equally close quarters, and his verdict was fast and seasoned.

"He's reeking of it—rum, whisky, and I don't know what else. She must be the same. Probably celebrating the haul they made. We'd better take 'em both in. Blow your whistle, stupid!"

the murder of king abdullah

by . . . George Fielding Eliot

A House in the Old City of Jerusalem—
July 17, 1951—2:30 p.m.

Mustafa Shuqri Ashu stood at the window, peering through the intricate tracery of the fret-work screen at the woman in the garden below. She lay at ease on the silken cushions. Her face and neck, her plump arms and the curving edge of her billowy breasts were all exposed by carelessly thrown-back garments: for this was a private place, supposedly guarded against the intrusion of male eyes.

Mustafa's mouth watered as he watched her: he had dreamt of her only the night before, a dream from which he had wakened to find himself perspiring from head to foot. He began to tremble: a thin stream of saliva drooled from the corner of his mouth down his receding chin. He had known women before—was he not a man grown, full twenty years old?—but what were bazaar-girls, selling their favors for a few piastres, to this pearl among women who was promised to him if—

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"She is thinking of you," purred the voice of Ahmed el-Ayyubbi close to his ear. Mustafa jumped. El-Ayyubbi had come on silent feet, as always. His small eyes glittered in their sockets of fat.

"But she has never seen me!" objected Mustafa.

"She has watched you often, when you did not know," el-Ayyubbi assured him. "She told me only this morning how she longed for the hour when you would come to her—when she could receive you as a true Fida'i, a Faithful One, an initiate of the Sacred Struggle. To such alone will she yield her charms. Now you have feasted your eyes long enough. Come: all is ready for the test."

Mustafa did not want to leave the window—this was only the second time he had been allowed to see her. But Mustafa was afraid to argue with el-Ayyubbi. A djinn dwelt in that fat body—a djinn that even such fierce warriors as the Okkeh brothers did not care to rouse. The spindly youth followed fat Ayyubbi across the room, through a door and along a hall to the head of a stairway which led downward into a realm of darkness and dank odors. Here Mustafa spent most of his time: here were the tumbled rags of his bed, the fragments of his last meal—when was it, yesterday? This morning he had not felt like taking food: they had granted him a dream-pill the night before, and that was better even than roast mutton glistening with grease.

Ahead of him, el-Ayyubbi opened another door. A white glare of light revealed still another flight of descending steps: below, at their foot, human figures crowded under the flood-lamp.

They were not human, as Mustafa knew well. They were pasteboard targets, suspended on cords. An overhead arrangement of pulleys allowed them to ascend the stairway, one by one.

"Take your place, Mustafa," Ayyubbi ordered. "Abed Okkeh will give you the weapon."

Mustafa had a glimpse of Okkeh's truculent mustache at the edge of the lighted space: he knew he was holding out his hand, he knew his fingers had closed on the butt of the revolver—and yet he had a feeling of standing far away, watching someone else doing these things. It was always like that after he had had a dream-pill.

Now he had to stand still and wait, looking through the peepholes at the pasteboard target figures at the foot of the cellar stairs. His attention was fixed on the first figure, which represented a small man in a gray robe and a white turban. It was moving—coming up the stairs toward him, gliding along as Abed Okkeh slowly drew in the cord. Behind it, when it was half-way up the steps, the other figures began ascending two by two. They were painted to repre-

sent soldiers in khaki uniforms, with red-and-white checkered kaffiyas draped about their heads. These were operated by Abed Okkeh's younger brother, Zakaria.

Mustafa knew the rules. When the leading figure had reached the top step, he must step out from his place of concealment and fire at the blank space where the face would be, if this pasteboard thing were a man. In the fierce light, Okkeh could see where the bullet struck. If it hit where it ought to, Okkeh would drop the target, just as a man shot through the head would drop. Meanwhile, the speed of ascent of the remaining figures would be increased, as though they were running to aid the little one in the gray robe. At them, Mustafa must fire his four remaining shots.

Mustafa had practiced this daily for more than three weeks. At first he had done poorly, and had suffered the consequences—el-Ayyubbi was a cruel man with a whip. Lately, he had improved—the last three times, he had almost made a perfect score and had been rewarded with a dream-pill and just now by a glimpse of his promised love. This time—

The gray figure was at the top step. Mustafa stepped out, fired. The figure fell. Steadily Mustafa squeezed off the remaining shots in the revolver at the khaki shapes which rushed up at him.

"Four hits," said Abed Okkeh into the sudden silence. "Besides the first, which was dead center."

A perfect score at last! Excitement hammered at Mustafa's temples. He was dimly aware that el-Ayyubbi was embracing him—was bidding him welcome to the Brotherhood of the Jihad Mukadess, the Sacred Struggle. His mind—which had room for but one thought at a time—had already left el-Ayyubbi. He was thinking of the woman he had won—

"Ahmed! Ahmed el-Ayyubbi!" Someone was running across the floor, bleating excitedly. "His Excellency is here, asking for you."

"I come," said el-Ayyubbi. "You also, Mustafa."

The man who paced impatiently in the overfurnished room at the front of the house spoke sharply as Ayyubbi entered:

"Are you ready? There's no more time to be lost!"

"Just ready, praise be to Allah," answered Ayyubbi with a quick glance at Mustafa. "Has anything gone wrong?"

"There was this business in Amman last night," the other said. Something in his voice, a tone of one accustomed to command, reached into Mustafa's clouded mind and rivetted attention on this a tallish man, wearing clothes of English cut and a red tarboosh.

Mustafa found himself—to his dim astonishment—seated at a table with the others. Zakaria Okkeh brought in coffee.

"I have heard—all Jerusalem is ringing with the news," Ayyubbi was saying. "No loose ends, I trust?"

"None," the stranger answered. He sipped his coffee, went on: "The two dispensers of justice have both passed to their reward. I was afraid of the Syrian—but the other was one of ours. He turned his weapon on the escort as he had been—" his voice dropped to a whisper, and Ayyubbi smiled slightly, kicking another quick glance in Mustafa's direction. Mustafa didn't understand at all, but he was glowing with pleasure at being accepted in such company. There was something about being a Brother of the Sacred Struggle, after all!

"What was done was well done," the stranger continued. "We had sure information that Riad Bey had been won over by the King—or bought over. He was ready to sell his country to the Jews and his soul to Shaitan. Therefore he had to die."

"May his example be heeded in higher places," murmured el-Ayyubbi.

"When did that rash and wicked man ever give heed to threats?" was the fierce reply. "The death of Riad has had the opposite effect—I have just had word from a reliable source that tonight Abdullah summons the Jewish emissaries once more to the Summer Palace at El Shune. He prepares his final stroke: therefore the need for haste."

A low rumble of hate ran round the table. The Okkeh brothers fingered their weapons: el-Ayyubbi raised eyes to the ceiling.

"How long, O Allah, how long must we suffer this tyrant?" he grated.

"Not long, if the avenging blade is well-whetted," snapped the stranger. "Three days hence, he again attends noon-day prayer at El Aqsa. Last time we were forewarned, but were not ready. This time—"

He was looking at Mustafa.

"This time, if Allah wills—" murmured Ayyubbi. His voice trailed off again into inaudible murmurs.

"Say no more, Ahmed," the stranger broke in. He laid a hand on Mustafa's shoulder. "To look into the face of this noble youth is to know he is ready for his high destiny. I shall report to the Chosen of Allah that the work is in safe hands."

He patted Mustafa's shoulder and smiled into his eyes.

Mustafa wriggled with delight. He wanted to say something—to tell this great effendi who treated him so kindly that he was ready to do anything to prove his devotion—the words would not come.

The stranger was on his feet, moving toward the door. Ayyubbi trotted beside him, whispering: the Okkeh brothers trailed behind.

Outside, a newsboy hawked his wares: through the window Mustafa could see the headlines in glaring Arabic characters—RIAD BEY EL-SOLH, EX-PRIME MINISTER OF LEBANON, MURDERED ON ROAD TO AMMAN AIRPORT. He could see, but he learned nothing: he had never been taught to read.

Nor did he take note of the two men in khaki and red-and-white kaffiyas who lurked across the street in an arched doorway.

Perhaps had he heard the one who wore chevrons on his arm whisper to the other: "Run now to District Police Headquarters and say that Moussa el-Husseini has just left the house of Ahmed el-Ayyubbi with the two Okkeh brothers, and that I follow them and will report later," he might have wondered why—as it was, he had no thoughts to spare for sergeants of the Arab Legion police.

The image of the wondrous stranger faded from his mind: the woman took its place—

"Those Bedawi dogs," growled el-Ayyubbi, closing the door, "are nosing for a scent. Allah blight their brains. Eh?"

Mustafa stood close beside him, panting a little.

A grin of understanding creased Ayyubbi's fat face.

"Come, brother," he said, "and enjoy your foretaste of the joys of Paradise."

It did not occur to Mustafa that there was anything odd about the remark. The musk-filled room into which el-Ayyubbi thrust him might have been Paradise itself for all Mustafa knew—or cared.

El Shune—The Summer Palace of the King of Jordan—
July 20, 1951—9:00 a.m.

"I am resolved," said the King.

He stood—a short, sturdy figure in gray robe and spotless white turban—before the window which looked down on the tumbling waters of the Nimrim River.

"But, Your Majesty—" began the Councillor of State.

"No buts!" the King interrupted. "I have listened to too many buts these past three years. My plans are complete. There will be no more hesitation. I am going to make peace with the Jews. They have accepted my terms. There is no more to be said."

Above his jutting beard, the King's bright brown eyes—sparkling more brilliantly than the jewels of the dagger he wore at his girdle—flashed from one to the other of the two men who faced him as though daring them to contradict him.

It was, as all men knew, a bold spirit indeed who would venture to argue with Abdullah ibn Husein, King of the Hashemite Jordan Kingdom, when he spoke in that tone of final decision. The Coun-

cillor of State, grown white-haired in loyal service to the Hashemite House, inclined his head and was silent. But the Minister said:

"And Your Majesty's enemies?"

"Will accept what they cannot prevent," snapped the King. "Farouk will mutter, but he dares not move—his own position in Egypt is too weak. Ibn Saud will snarl—but he will do no more than he did in '48 against the Jews: exactly nothing that will endanger his oil revenues. Syria is in chaos. With my cousin in Baghdad I have an understanding. Moreover I have my Arab Legion—the only Army in the Arab world worthy of its salt. Who then will say 'No' when Abdullah the son of Husein says 'Yes'?"

"If these were all," murmured the Minister, "I should have less anxiety. But Your Majesty knows—"

"I know who it is who sits in Cairo in his pink house and weaves plots," interrupted the King furiously. "I know whose emissaries are ever at work stirring up trouble in Jerusalem and in the refugee camps. I know who dares to call himself the Chosen of Allah. Bah! It was I who dismissed Haj Amin el-Husseini from his post as Mufti of Jerusalem, which he had too long disgraced. Let him and all his Husseini clan plot and stew as they like. I heed them not. Nor should you, my faithful friends."

"They work in darkness," said the Minister, "and they strike as the serpent strikes. Who hired the assassins who slew Riad Bey el-Solh four days ago in Your Majesty's own car? The police say that one at least of the killers was a man of the Jihad Mukadess—the gang of assassins organized by the Mufti ten years ago to rid him of his political foes in Palestine. I implore Your Majesty to take heed of this warning. All your plans, all your hopes are based on the continued safety of your person: without you, all collapses. Forgive me that I persist—"

The King waved him to silence.

"Between friends there is no question of forgiving," the King said. "You are doing your duty as you see it. I must do mine. It is not a matter merely of peace with the Jews, or of the resumption of trade. It is the future—the future of the Arab people. They must be awakened. Their danger is not in Israel, but in the power of the Soviets. I say again as I have said before—the Arabs must rid themselves of their despotic rulers, they must join hands with the democracies in the struggle against horrifying Communism. The first step in that direction is peace on their own borders. Therefore I make peace—and by the beard of the Prophet, I enforce it too if I must! Today at the holy mosque of Aqsa I shall pray for the strength and wisdom—"

There came a sharp double knock at the door: a chamberlain entered, salaamed.

"Major Nadim Bey Rajib comes in haste from Jerusalem and craves audience," he announced.

The Minister and the Councillor of State exchanged anxious glances.

"Now what," growled the King, "can the Commandant of the Jerusalem Police District have to say to me which he could not present through the proper channels?"

"With submission, Majesty," begged the venerable Councillor, "I implore you to hear him."

"Very well," yielded the King. "But let him be quick—it is nearly time to be going if we are to reach el Aqsa by the hour of noon-day prayer."

The chamberlain stood back, swinging the door farther open: through it strode an erect, trim-mustached officer in the khaki of the Arab Legion. He halted midway of the splendid rug, spurs clicking and cloak a-swirl about his booted legs: his hand snapped up in salute.

"I bid you welcome, Nadim Bey," said the King, and waited.

"I come, Majesty," said the officer abruptly, "to beg Your Majesty not to go today to Jerusalem. Your coming is known: the bazaars and coffee-houses are buzzing with it. And there are evil whispers abroad —whispers of a plot against Your Majesty's life."

"Am I to hide away from whispers?" snapped the King.

"Furthermore," Nadim Bey went on, "it is known that Moussa el-Husseini, the cousin of the former Mufti, receives messengers from Cairo. Also he has been seen at the house of Ahmed el-Ayyubbi, who calls himself a vegetable merchant but whose true character is otherwise; he consorts with the brothers Okkeh, who were terrorists in the Mufti's time. Give me leave to cleanse Jerusalem of these rascals, Majesty, before you venture your royal person within the walls."

"And stir up the hornets' nest without more reason than your fears?" scoffed the King. "So that misguided fools would riot in the streets and have to be shot down? No, Nadim Bey. Nor will I change my plans because of coffee-house mutterings. Are the cars ready?"

The chamberlain bowed assent.

"At least, Majesty," implored Nadim Bey, "permit me to order that the Bodyguard shall keep close to you at all times while you are in Jerusalem."

The King shook his head, laughing a little.

"An Arab King," he said, "must walk alone and without fear among his people, that all who seek justice or aid may approach him freely. It is the tradition of my House. Let the Bodyguard keep their distance as always. As for my life, it is in the hands of Allah, the Compassionate, the All-Knowing—on whom be peace."

The King moved toward the door. The others could do nothing save follow their headstrong mas-

ter. Five minutes later the royal motorcade was on the road to the Allenvy Bridge, Jericho—and Jerusalem.

The King spoke but once during the journey—when his Cadillac came to the top of the last rise and he saw the sun glittering on the Dome of the Rock.

"Jerusalem!" he murmured. "A Holy City to men of three great faiths. Yet there was an ancient chronicler who wrote of Jerusalem —*Thou golden bowl of scorpions!* No doubt he was thinking of the people who live there. They have changed but little through the years."

The Mosque of Aqsa, Jerusalem—
July 20, 1951—12 noon.

Mustafa Shuqri Ashu waited in the shadow of the pillared arches which look down upon the wide strone steps of the Aqsa Mosque and the courtyard below. These arches are called Al-Mizan—the Balances. Here on the Day of Judgment, it is written that the souls of all men will be weighed by Allah in giant scales hung beneath the arches—the souls of Kings as well as the souls of assassins.

Mustafa was not thinking of the Day of Judgment. He was hardly thinking at all. He was merely the instrument of those who had placed him there—as much a piece of controlled mechanism as the revolver in the pocket of his shabby brown jacket. He was there to do as he had been bidden, and he was very sure of his reward—

There was a stir in the courtyard. Half-a-dozen smart troopers, cross-belted and spurred, took post just inside the gate. They were men of the Hashemite Regiment—the Royal Bodyguard of the King of Jordan. An officer strode through, his long cloak billowing behind him as he whirled and stiffened to salute.

Past him, returning the salute with military precision, moved a smallish gray-bearded man in a gray robe and white turban.

The King had come to make his noonday devotions at the Aqsa Mosque.

Mustafa's opaque, expressionless eyes fixed themselves upon the King and remained there, unwavering, seeing nothing else.

The King came straight across the courtyard toward the steps of the mosque, walking with his customary quick stride—and walking alone. Behind him, at the prescribed distance of twenty paces, the troopers of the Bodyguard followed, while the Minister, the Councillor of State and others of the royal retinue—including several Arab Legion officers walked a little apart.

Unhesitatingly the King started up the steps.

Mustafa's hashish-misted mind recognized the familiar picture: the gray-robed, white-turbaned figure

which climbed toward him, followed by others in khaki and red-and-white head-dresses. He knew what he had to do—a perfect score, and then—

The King set foot on the topmost step.

Mustafa slid the revolver from his pocket, stepped out from behind the pillar and fired straight into the King's face.

Abdullah ibn Husein fell dead on the tiled pavement, a bullet through his brain.

Yelling with fury, the troopers of the Bodyguard charged up the steps, firing as they came. Mustafa Shuqri Ashu stood calmly beside the body of his victim. He made no effort to escape. With steady hand, even while his own body jerked under the impact of avenging bullets, he fired the four shots remaining in his revolver at the oncoming troopers. Then he crumpled to the tiles—

Now the troopers were all about him, still pouring bullets into his bleeding body. Through them charged Major Nadim Bey Rajib, thrusting the maddened men aside, beating them back with fist and scabbarded sword.

"Back! Stand back and cease firing!" he roared. "We want that man alive!"

Too late he won his way to the bullet-riddled body, wrenched away the revolver which the dead hand still clutched.

"Watch out, Major!" cried Lieutenant Naji Zeid, the officer of the escort, himself bleeding from one of Mustafa's bullets. "The dog has another gun—see—his left hand's in his pocket—"

Nadim Bey grabbed Mustafa's left wrist, pulled the hand out of the pocket. The fingers, even in death, were clasped tightly: they held no gun, merely a slip of paper —roughly Nadim Bey forced them open. Together, while others crowded round, he and Naji Zeid read the words written in flowing Arabic script:

"Kill and be not afraid, for this day shalt thou lie with the houris of Paradise."

The eyes of the two officers met.

"There is but one man alive who presumes to dispense the favors of Allah with such assurance," snarled Nadim Bey through clenched teeth.

"Aye—and that man is—"

"No names here!" cut in the Minister in a tone of sharp anxiety.

The lieutenant choked off the words that were rising to his lips and nursed his shattered shoulder.

But a sergeant of the Bodyguard who had seen and heard cried out in a rage that no discipline could restrain:

"Then *I* will speak a name! The name of Haj Amin el-Husseini, who calls himself the Mufti of Jerusalem! May Shaitan's claws tear his black soul!" He set his spurred heel on Mustafa's gun-hand, lying limp on the tiles, and ground the dead

flesh and bone into a crimson pulp. "May Allah grant me," he prayed aloud, "that as I deal now with the hand that slew my lord the King, so one day I may deal with the brain behind that hand!"

"You see!" grated the wounded lieutenant. "All men know the author of this murder."

Tears welled from his eyes and trickled down his bronzed cheeks as he stood erect, saluting with his unwounded arm as the men of the Bodyguard bore the dead King into the Mosque.

So, on the third prayer day of the month of Shawal in the year of the Prophet 1370—which is to say July 20, 1951, by Christian reckoning—died Abdullah ibn Husein, King of Jordan, the greatest Arab prince of his time and the only balance-wheel of the Arab world.

He was murdered because, had he lived, he would have made peace with Israel. To that end he had worked and planned for three years: he was on the threshold of success. Like Henry IV of France, whose Great Decision might have brought peace to warring Europe—for a time at least—he was killed by the enemies of peace. Like Henry, he was forewarned on the very morning of the murder-day, and he would not listen. The hopes of peace died with him: he was the keystone, without his leadership and vast personal prestige, his Great Design, collapsed in ruin.

Peace and the reopening of trade between Israel and Jordan would have shattered the Arab League at a moment when no other Arab power was able to take counteraction, while Soviet attention was fixed on Korea. It would have set up a new grouping of Arab states under Hashemite influence, released the energies of the Israeli people into channels of commerce, industry and social progress, opened the way to relieve the sufferings of the Arab refugees. Above all, it would have brought much of this area into close and increasingly confident cooperation with the West. For Abdullah was a friend of Britain and America, a sworn enemy of Communism. He had no love for Israel, but he saw clearly that the Soviet power was the true threat to all the Middle East—a threat far greater to the Arab future than Israel could ever be.

Therefore those whose minds were closed to any hate save hate of Israel sought his death—and accomplished it. Of course Communist influence and money were involved—and the jealousy and spite of Farouk of Egypt and Ibn Saud of Arabia. But there can be no doubt that the moving spirit behind the assassination of King Abdullah was Haj Amin el Husseini, ex-Mufti of Jerusalem, whose trained assassins are still the terror of the Middle East.

With the King's death came a

great silence. His enemies were satisfied. His friends feared for their own lives, for who was safe when a King had been struck down? His faithful Legion would not be denied vengeance on such of the plotters as they could lay hands upon. Moussa el-Husseini, the two Okkeh brothers and a man named Harahat who had supplied the murder weapon were tried before a military court in Amman and hanged: Moussa—the Mufti's cousin—confessed his guilt at the last moment. Such of the evidence at the trial as was published was conclusive enough as to the guilt of the defendants, but it was not informative as to those who directed them. Reading it, one has the impression of watching pieces move on a spot-lighted chessboard while the hands that move them remain unseen. . . .

NEXT MONTH—

A Maharajah teaches a rude man a lesson in

UNTOUCHABLE by ROBERT BLOCH

Detective Koski hunts a killer in

CORPSE DOCTOR by STEWART STERLING

A girl's bag makes a man the target of killers in

THE HANDS OF DEATH by BRUNO FISCHER

Private Eye Manny Moon faces the Mafia in

BLOOD OATH by RICHARD DEMING

Nothing—absolutely nothing—could stop

THE FRIENDLY MURDERER by LAWRENCE TREAT

—in The March Issue of *THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE*

adventure of the broken chessman

by . . . August Derleth

IN JUNE of the same year in which Solar Pons examined into the singular affair of the Black Narcissus, he was sitting one evening, engaged in the compilation of his voluminous scrapbook of British crimes and criminological data, and talking desultorily of the events which passed under his eye.

"The majority of crimes are remarkably unimaginative," he said. "A body found in a little-traveled lane—a corpse in a boudoir—murder during robbery. Here, for instance," he read, " 'Lodger Found Dead. Mrs. Ottilia Baker, 37 Woburn Place, this morning discovered the body of a lodger dead in his room. The unfortunate man's head had been battered in, and his room had been ransacked. Mrs. Baker identified her lodger as Landon Hall. Relatives are asked to communicate with Scotland Yard.' Surely nothing could be more prosaic?" He paused thoughtfully, his hand going to the lobe of his left ear. "And yet," he went on, " 'Landon Hall' is almost certainly an assumed name. One can infer as

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August Derleth has been responsible, by now, for more than seventy books of all kinds, history, biography, poetry, historical novels, mysteries and anthologies, but there are many who know of him only as the author of the Solar Pons stories, the superb pastiches of which the present "Adventure" is an early—and interesting—example. . . .

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much not only by its sound but also by the patent indication that his landlady knows so little about him and his origins that 'relatives are asked to communicate with Scotland Yard.'"

"I suppose there are thousands of people who drop out of sight only to assume new identities and begin life over in some other place," I ventured.

"Elementary," murmured Pons. "It is their motives which are of primary interest."

He put the clipping away and went on to others. From time to time he read sentences from the dispatches, making brief comments on them. Ostensibly, the matter of Mrs. Ottilia Baker's murdered lodger had been forgotten. Yet it was destined to be brought again to our attention, and that before the evening was done.

It was at eight o'clock that the door bell jangled. Pons was at the moment near the window; he drew aside the curtain and looked down into Praed Street.

"Ah, we are about to have a visitor of some importance," he observed. "It may well be an invitation to another of those little adventures which you are so fond of chronicling, Parker."

He returned from the window in time to greet the tall, cloaked individual Mrs. Johnson admitted. He came into the room somewhat diffidently, inclined his head slightly, and looked toward Pons.

"Mr. Solar Pons?"

"I am at your service," answered Pons, and placed a chair for our visitor, whose voice, I could not help noticing, had a distinctly foreign accent.

Of our visitor's face, I could see very little, for his long black cloak successfully covered his chin, and his eyes were hidden by smoked glasses, attached to what appeared to be an expensive black cord which, followed downward, disappeared into the folds of his cloak at the neck. His hands were gloved, and he carried a walking stick, which was of ebony with an ivory handle. His lips were thin and firm, his nose was sharply aquiline. His hair was jet black, and the bushy eyebrows projecting above the rims of his glasses were black, too.

"It will be necessary that my identity remain a secret, Mr. Pons; it would not be politic for my connection with the matter in question to become known."

Pons seated himself to face our visitor and inquired, without a flicker of mischief, "What is the matter in question. M. Parenin?"

Our visitor started slightly, but betrayed himself by no other sign. "Ah, you know me."

"I submit that as long as the ensign on your motor remains unaltered, any attempt at personal concealment is foredoomed to failure. The ensign suggests the Russian consul," replied Pons. "But I daresay the matter you have come to see

me about is not connected with your official status or with the official business of the government you represent."

"Not directly, Mr. Pons. That is to say, not as yet. I may at any moment receive orders from Leningrad to proceed in the matter, but thus far I am acting solely on my own initiative."

"Pray let us consider the problem, M. Parenin."

"You may have read of a Mrs. Ottilia Baker's discovering a murdered lodger at her establishment at 37 Woburn Place this morning," began Parenin crisply.

"I remember doing so. A gentleman named Landon Hall; obviously, I thought, an assumed name."

"It was not Landon Hall who was found dead, however," continued Parenin. "A description subsequently published in the metropolitan papers was called to my attention by my secretary. I recognized the victim at once as one of Russia's secret agents—a certain man, notoriously known for his shrewdness and bestiality, as well as the disturbing degree of his success in the zealous prosecution of his assignments. You will be familiar with his name, Mr. Pons—it is Pyotor Propov."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Pons. "At one time of the terrible Inner Circle; the same man who shot the aged Prince Casimir in 1918, who assassinated the children of Madame Kolosov, who decapitated the Grand Duchess Yolande—among other outrages."

"Your information is correct, Mr. Pons. It was he whose body Mrs. Baker discovered in Landon Hall's room this morning. My secretary has viewed the body; there is no question about this identity."

"I have little inclination to apprehend his murderer," said Pons dryly.

Our visitor smiled. "It was not my intention to ask you to do so. It is because I desire the opposite end that I have wished my identity kept secret. Mr. Pons, I would wish you to do all in your power to so confuse the official police that they will not suspect the identity of the actual murderer!"

Pons looked his surprise and delight. "Dear me, M. Parenin! What an extraordinary request!"

"I confide in you that I never had any love for Propov or his methods; I am not alone in my convictions," our visitor assured Pons. "Believe me, sir, I could mention many names closely associated with our government."

Pons rested his chin briefly on his clasped hands. "I can understand your abhorrence of Propov's methods," he said presently. "But, in view of the unusual nature of your request, I am sure you will allow me some time to consider it, M. Parenin. I do not think that I could with conceivable justice block the investigation. I should be

forced on my honor to give the police such assistance as I can, though manifestly I need not do so in so direct a fashion that they have only to act to complete the matter. Who is in charge from the Yard?"

"An Inspector Jamison," replied our visitor at once.

"Ah, our old friend, Jamison." Pons smiled. "I am curious to know what he makes of the problem. I fear, though, that the official police will have had ample time to muddle up the scene."

"On the contrary," interposed the Russian consul. "I have used the influence of the consulate to have everything kept as it was found until you arrive on the scene."

"Capital!" exclaimed Pons. "We will run over without delay."

Our ride to number 37 Woburn Place was painstakingly slow, for the consul's chauffeur found it necessary to drive with caution in the thick yellow fog which had settled over London. Traffic was halted for some time at Charing Cross Road junction by extremely heavy traffic pouring down Tottenham Court Road from North London. Moreover, travel along New Oxford Street and Holborn was little better. Yet, in a relatively short time, we came to a stop before a three-story building which loomed up darkly in the fog.

Pons and I left the car without the consul.

M. Parenin leaned from the machine. "It would not do for me to be seen here, Mr. Pons, but I shall be found at any time at the consulate. I shall be happy to call on you if you wish and to do whatever I can to assist your inquiry."

A constable called out from the entrance to the lodging-house; at this, M. Parenin gave a curt order to his chauffeur; the car started up and was quickly swallowed by the close-pressing fog. The constable came part way down to the street, barring the way.

"No admittance," he announced flatly. But at this moment the light from his torch found Pons' face. "Oh, it's Mr. Pons. And Dr. Parker. Excuse me, sir. Just follow me, Mr. Pons. Inspector Jamison's inside."

The torch went ou tand the constable moved away from us to throw open the outer door. At the sound of our entrance, a constable looked from a room at the far end of a long hall, his head framed in the light streaming through the open doorway. He withdrew, and gave place to Inspector Jamison, whose rotund form was readily recognizable as he stepped out into the hall to confront us.

"My word, Pons!" he exclaimed. "I never thought to encounter you at the scene of so ordinary a crime."

"However intentioned, you flatter me," said Pons with a thin smile. "Yet it hardly strikes me that the discovery of an unknown victim of murder in a room let to someone else is entirely commonplace."

Jamison shrugged and stepped aside, his chubby face with its carefully kept moustache turned now toward the contents of the room. "Take a look around, Pons. We'd like to have the body moved; the Foreign Office ordered us to disturb nothing until you had seen the place."

The first object to attract Pons' attention was, of course, the corpse of the victim, almost in the center of the room, the body slumped upon a small table from a large armchair. The head and shoulders had fallen forward to a chessboard on the table and lay grotesquely amid a scattered group of overturned chessmen. In falling forward, the victim's arm must have swept half the table clear, for chessmen were flung over the floor to the left. The right arm supported the victim's head, and in his right hand a chessman was still tightly clenched. Quite evidently the murdered man had been struck down from behind; next to the chair on the floor lay the heavy candelabrum already designated by Scotland Yard as the instrument of death.

The victim, I saw after but a little examination, was not too well dressed; yet there were some indications that his dress was casual rather by deliberation than of necessity. He was extremely obese, and his large, flabby hands with the puffy face beneath the bushy black beard which covered the lower half of it, testified to indulgent living. He was far from an attractive man; he would easily have repelled many people in life.

Pons, however, paid scant attentino t othe body. He seemed more concerned with traces of the former occupant of the room than with the victim's appearance. The room itself was indeed in a state of disorder, as the accounts in the press stated; it gave every evidence of having been hastily gone through in a determined search. Drawers stood half open, clothes lay on the floor of the open closet at the far end of the room, books and papers were tumbled indiscriminately from the shelves and stands along the walls.

"Has anything been taken from Propov's pockets?" asked Pons.

Jamison nodded and pointed silently to a chair opposite the victim. There lay two objects: an ordinary sandbag and a peculiar metal seal. Pons examined one after the other with his customary care.

"The sandbag is Propov's trade mark," said Jamison. "The seal seems to be that of some secret organization."

"The Inner Circle," suggested Pons with an oblique smile.

"I wondered about that," assented Jamison, "but I'm not sure the organization's still in existence. The Yard's had no definite word of the Circle's work of late; neither has British Intelligence. We can assume that the Circle has either

been suppressed or that it's gone underground."

"The design in the seal is crudely stamped in and suggests the Soviet government," said Pons, handing the seal to Jamison. "The Inner Circle has probably been absorbed into the OGPU."

Pons now walked attentively about the room, examining drawers and books on the shelves, pausing before one shelf of books for some time. He invaded the clothes-closet and the adjoining lavatory. He returned at last and stood with Jamison gazing at the body.

"Undoubtedly the Yard has evolved a theory," said Pons.

"Nothing definite, no," answered Jamison. "It's my idea this man Propov came here to do away with Mrs. Baker's lodger, but something went wrong and the tables were turned. I don't entirely eliminate the possibility of a third person's concern, of course."

"You have a description of the man who called himself Landon Hall?"

"As far as it goes, yes. Mrs. Baker's statement isn't particularly helfpul. A man of medium height, with a small pointed beard—"

"Yet someone shaved in the bathroom not less than twenty-four hours ago," interposed Pons.

"He might have shaved himself," agreed Jamison. "That would be the logical thing to do if he killed Propov and hoped to escape."

"Clean-shaven, then. A man who walked with a limp, and probably had a left leg of cork—you too certainly noticed the smooth left boots of each pair in the closet."

Jamison nodded casually.

"A man of some wealth," Pons went on, "for only a wealthy man would afford a single private printing of a Russian translation of Brillat-Savarin's *Physiology of Taste,* with an inlaid original plate by Augustus John. A highly cultured man; he has books in seven different languages. And I daresay a pronounced aesthete, for he owns such books as Huysmans' *A Rebours* and *La Bas,* Machen's *Hill of Dreams,* Pater's *Marius,* Ruskin's *Stones of Venice,* and others expounding aesthetic doctrines. Finally, he was either of the Russian nobility or in a position to receive their books, for many of his volumes are marked with the Romanoff coat of arms."

Jamison looked at Pons a little askance.

"Of course, you noticed that the man wore his hair rather long, and that he was of middle age or past, as the long grey and black hairs on the great coat in the closet tell us. And you will doubtless have seen that Hall was of a highly nervous temperament, and that he wore a monocle?"

"You have the better of me, Pons," said Jamison with admirable patience. "One would think you know the man."

"I fancy I do," said Pons quietly.

Jamison looked the amazement he felt. "Oh, come now, Pons! You don't expect me to believe that?"

Pons smiled enigmatically.

"But if you do, of course, your inferences about his appearance are elementary," continued Jamison. "His nervous temperament, for instance."

"In the second drawer of that bureau beyond the table you'll find an eyeglass on a cord; the cord is badly frayed along a section covered by the movement of the clip on it," answered Pons. "I submit that nervous people who wear glasses consistently play with the clips on their cords, twirl them, and otherwise occupy their hands. But these matters are, as you say, elementary. You were beginning to tell me your concept of what took place here, assuming that Propov came here to do away with Hall."

"Yes." Jamison would have gone on, but Pons once again interrupted him.

"And then softened sufficiently to sit down for a game of chess with him?"

Jamison was momentarily disconcerted. "Perhaps. The tenant Hall may not have known Propov."

"I rather think he did. As a matter of fact, an old picture of Propov, clipped from a newspaper, lies between the pages of one of the books on the top shelf of the rack across from the table. A book with a bright red binding," Pons went on, as Constable Jones went over to examine the books on the top shelf.

The picture was shortly laid down before Jamison, who examined it thoughtfully, his pale eyes narrowed.

"That's at least five years old, Pons," he said. "Hall might easily have forgotten him since then."

"I do not remember saying anything to the contrary," agreed Pons. "But the picture you adduce of a man bent on murder coming calmly to a chess game and himself being murdered leaves some unsatisfactory questions. I submit that murder was not Comrade Propov's primary goal. I suggest that he was in search of something."

Jamison made an all-embracing gesture toward the ransacked appearance of the room.

"Ah, but this melée was not made by someone in search of something," protested Pons. "Surely Hall would not have permitted Propov to ransack his room? And surely, had he done so, Propov would not be sitting at chess. No, the appearance of the room derives from the haste of the murderer to take his leave with such valuables as he could not do without."

"Unless, of course, we postulate a third and thus far unknown murderer."

"Granted. You have looked up Propov?"

"Yes. He was registered at 217 St. George Street as Pyotor Harlov. The area is one frequented by Russian emigrés."

"Very probably then Hall knew Propov initially as Harlov."

"We have assumed that Hall recognized Propov only as a fellow-Russian," said Jamison. "This meeting was very likely not their first. Hall, if a Russian, was himself in hiding, and took Propov for another Russian in hiding. What happened, as I see it, was this: in the middle of a game of chess, Hall believes that his life is in danger from the man he knows as Harlov. He rises on some pretext and, passing behind Propov, seizes the candelabrum and strikes Propov down. He then shaves hurriedly, takes only the barest necessities, and escapes."

"Yet he left his wallet, well stuffed with notes, in the pocket of his great coat."

"He may easily have forgotten it," explained Jamison.

"Despite taking the trouble to shave in order to disguise himself? Does it not seem logical that, having gone so far, he should also supply himself with money to take him from London?"

"He may have had other resources."

"Conceivably. You postulate that Propov and Hall were acquainted as countrymen; Propov's London address would be a natural place for Hall to make Propov's acquaintance, assuming both men to be in hiding. Yet, does it not seem somewhat unusual that Hall, a highly cultured man, would frequent a place which is not particularly noted for harboring men of culture, but rather more men of Propov's calibre?"

"Why not?" protested Jamison. "The fellow was in hiding, wasn't he? He was a Russian; it seems natural that he'd seek out other Russians even at the risk of running afoul of the Yard."

Pons raised his eyebrows. "You believe he was in hiding from the police? I submit rather that he was hiding from his fellow countrymen."

"Then how explain his willingness to see Propov?" countered Jamison triumphantly.

"We have no evidence that he was willing to see Propov," retorted Pons. "Rather Harlov."

"Very well," snapped Jamison, disgruntled. "Go on."

"We might as conceivably suspect Hall and Propov of being two Soviet government agents in a quarrel which turned out disastrously for Propov. In such an event, the charge would very likely be murder in the first degree. But if your hypothesis proves correct, would the charge not then be countered by a claim of self-defense?"

Jamison pursed his lips thoughtfully. "I doubt it," he said finally. "He might plead self-defense; wouldn't that be natural? Circumstantial evidence wouldn't prove his claim. Chances are, though, he'd be packed off to Russia, unless he's taken out papers."

"And left to the mercy of the Soviet government, eh?" asked Pons.

"I suppose so."

I had had no difficulty in following this seemingly aimless conversation; clearly Pons meant to establish in his own mind the possible fate of the man Hall, if Scotland Yard found him. Pons, however, having satisfied himself on this score, was now engaged in looking at the chessmen scattered about; he appeared to be counting them, and I, too, began almost unconsciously to add them up—sixteen pawns, four rooks, four knights, four bishops, two queens—but there was only one king. Perhaps the remaining king had been kicked under one of the articles of furniture.

Even as the thought occurred to me, Pons went to the floor on his knees and began to peer rapidly under the table and around the rug at the edge of the chairs. Jamison watched in silence; his association with Pons had been of sufficient duration to teach him a certain tacit respect for my companion's methods. He contented himself only with a routine examination of a chessman, a knight he picked up from the table.

The chessmen were carved in ivory and seemed very solid. The set was doubtless valuable; I should have regretted parting with it, had I owned it, for it appeared to be hand-wrought. But the set was evidently not without blemish, for when Pons came to his feet once more, he held in his hands two queens, one of which he immediately placed upright on the table, the other of which he continued to hold; its perfect whiteness was marred by a faint dull brown line which encircled it in the middle. It had obviously at one time been broken and mended with glue.

"I take it you noticed that one of the chessmen, a king, is missing?"

"I hadn't," confessed Jamison. "I daresay they played with a substitute."

"That is always a possibility, however remote," agreed Pons. He held the queen out to Jamison, who took it. "You have no objection to my keeping this?"

"None at all, provided only you'll have to surrender it if Hall turns up and demands it."

"Quite so," said Pons, dropping the chessman into his pocket.

"I need hardly ask," asked Jamison somewhat stuffily, "whether you and I are working toward the same end. I'm satisfied that anyone with power enough to hold us up for ten hours must be someone of considerable influence; so I'm satisfied on that score."

"Capital!" exclaimed Pons. "Yet there are a few favors I'd like to ask—for your own sake as well as mine. I want you to use the Yard's influence to insert a news paragraph in all the metropolitan dailies. Let the Yard phrase it as they

see fit. It should be to the effect that—" He paused abruptly, halted by the dubiety of Jamison's expression. "But, no, let me set it down."

He drew a chair up to the table, moved the chessmen to one side, and found paper in a drawer opposite Propov's body. Since he carried his pen with him, he was soon writing rapidly in a firm, legible hand, with Inspector Jamison and myself reading over his shoulders as he wrote, much to Pons' annoyance.

> The mysterious murder of an unknown person in the lodging house of Mrs. Ottilia Baker, 37 Woburn Place, was taken in hand today by Inspector Seymour R. Jamison, whose capable work in the matter of the Black Narcissus crime only two weeks ago will be recalled. Inspector Jamison quickly discovered that the deceased was Pyotor Harlov, a Russian emigré, registered at 217 St. George Street, Stepney. Spurred by the nature of the facts evident to him, the Inspector has now reached the conclusion that the lodger, Landon Hall, has also met with foul play, since many of his most valuable possessions are still in his lodgings. Mr. Hall may have been abducted, and various addresses in Stepney and Wapping, known to be frequented by Russian emigrés, are under surveillance.
>
> The body of Harlov has been removed, and the guard has been lifted. Mrs. Baker is in a request to relatives of Mr. Hall to step forward and remove his effects, so that she may re-let the room. That the criminal or criminals will not long remain at large is assured by Inspector Jamison's previous performances.

Pons finished; he turned to hand the account to Jamison. "Read it over and send it off at once."

"Very well, Pons," said Jamison, manifestly flattered at the highly complimentary nature of what my companion had written. He did not trouble to re-read the notice, but beckoned to Constable Jones, gave him what Pons had written, and turned back to Pons. "Do you suggest we watch 217 St. George Street for the abductors?"

"By all means, Jamison," replied Pons. "And, of course, you will withdraw your men from here at once."

Jamison demurred. "Do you think that the best course?"

"In view of the fact that Parker and I will occupy this room until at least the day after tomorrow, I think it is. If any results are to be expected, that plan is best. And pray observe that such results as I may obtain are yours as well. By all means take all the time you need to remove Propov's body and the evidence collected on that chair, with the addition of the candela-

brum, the *instrumentum mortis.*"

It was not until after Inspector Jamison and his men had departed that Pons relaxed. He sat down in the chair which had so recently held the evidence Jamison had collected and regarded the empty chair across from him with quizzical interest. From there his gaze went to the mantel behind, and I assumed that he was picturing Hall in the act of striking down Propov.

"Yes, you are right, Parker," Pons said without turning. "I am reconstructing the crime. There are aspects of it which I find nothing short of intriguing."

"Oh, come, Pons! It seems as plain as a pike-staff to me."

"I don't doubt it," he replied dryly. "But think on it for a moment. We are allowed to assume that Propov, the OGPU killer, is on Hall's trail. With what end but that to which so many other White Russians have come—assassination? Yet we have every evidence to believe that the two men, slayer and slain, were engaged in a game of chess before the crime. I submit that if Propov's motive and goal were Hall's death, no good could have come of having a game of chess with his intended victim. The portrait of the gloating killer is, I fear, limited very largely to the penny dreadfuls. No, I fancy, M. Propov's goal was not primarily Hall's death, whatever his secondary goal may have been. This seems to have escaped the good Jamison; I am curious to know whether it escaped M. Parenin as well."

"The circumstances are somewhat peculiar," I admitted.

"It is generous of you to say so," said Pons with a whimsical smile.

"But not half so peculiar as your statement that you knew who Hall really was."

"Ah, it is not particularly difficult to establish Hall's identity. We have been given several leading facts—he is a Russian emigré, he has some royal connections, he lacks one leg or foot, he wore a black van Dyke. Think back to 1917. Picture to yourself a Russian nobleman who fits Hall's description."

The picture was immediately provocative; it called to mind an old portrait-photograph I had seen in a London exhibit. The portrait, I remembered, had been labeled with the name of a gallant Russian count, and newspapers had made especial mention of his having had a leg shot off in a Polish border skirmish in 1914.

"Why," I began, "it would suggest—but no, he is dead."

"You were thinking of?" asked Pons.

"Count Sergei Romanoff, cousin to the Czar."

"Precisely. That is our man."

"Impossible!" I cried.

"Not at all! No one has ever proved his death. Can you recall the circumstances relating to his disappearance?"

"I know of none. I am certain he has never again appeared, though many court nobles have turned up in Vienna and Paris."

"Allow me to refresh your memory. Rumor prevalent in 1918 announced his escape, 'disappearance,' it was then called, a week before the Czar and his family were seized. Through Berlin, Scotland Yard received certain information with which Inspector Jamison might have done well to acquaint himself. The Count did not vanish entirely empty-handed; with him went a rather precious stone, the Orloff diamond, worth about a hundred thousand pounds."

"Ah! Propov's goal!"

"You have hit it, Parker. I congratulate you," said Pons. "I find it difficult to conceive that the Soviet would permit such a jewel to slip through their hands without at least an attempt to recapture it. The assignment is surely a natural one for a man like Propov. Yet the Count must have known the identity of his pursuer, whose search began in 1923, for the clipping he saved so suggests; it is dated 1923, which is additionally informative. The portrait in the clipping might account for the Count's failure to recognize Propov when he first saw him, for the black beard was not characteristic of Propov, who was one of those fellows who fancy themselves to best advantage with a strong lower jaw jutting out like a challenge to their fellowmen.

"Let us, then, reconstruct events as they very probably took place. We can assume that the Count met Propov, perhaps in one of those 'accidental' meetings which Popov, could arrange. Propov is in no haste to liquidate the Count; he must first learn where the stone is hidden. So he cultivates the Count, and he is finally invited to the Count's lodgings, where he waits for some betrayal of the jewel's hiding-place. Unfortunately for him, the Count recognizes Propov in the man Harlov, and acts at once, as Jamison concluded, by taking the offensive—rising on some pretext, passing behind his would-be assassin, to seize the heavy bronze candelabrum with which to kill Propov. His next moves are obviously the result of panic. Was Propov alone? Is the house under observation even now? He tries to disguise an identity already marked by his missing leg; he shaves, his panic growing. Finally he takes flight, taking with him only the Orloff diamond."

"I am afraid there is a flaw in the theory, Pons," I could not help pointing out, not without triumph. "There is no logic in Parenin's protection of a former Russian nobleman, the enemy of the Soviet whose government Parenin represents."

"Ah, there is little logic in mankind," answered Pons, smiling. "M. Parenin is, I fear, at heart a Royalist. And with no love for

Propov, whose innumerable atrocities serve to give any observer in possession of the facts a sense of the fitness of things at his end."

"Then if Parenin wants the Count to escape, how can you promise Jamison that your results will be his?"

"Surely they have always been, haven't they? Whether I wished it or not?"

"But you don't even know where the Count is!"

"No, nor have I any wish to. If Jamison keeps his word to insert the notice I wrote into the dailies, I expect him to call on us without delay."

"Absurd!" I cried. "He will be taken. Why should he come back?"

Pons smiled enigmatically. "Because he took the wrong chessman!"

"What do you mean?"

"Let me suggest that you compare the weight of that queen on the table with this one!"

He handed both to me.

"The difference in weight is so slight as to be almost imperceptible," continued Pons, "but it exists. The Orloff diamond lies hidden in the broken chessman you hold in your hand."

"But the Count certainly wouldn't make a mistake of that kind!"

"In the circumstances, he did. Look here." He bent and picked up the king. "We assume that the Count took the other king. I submit that this fact is capable of but one interpretation—that the king was also broken. Presumably the Count had originally attempted to conceal the stone in the king, found the king too small, and settled on the queen. In his panic, it was a simple mistake to seize the king instead of the queen; they are not dissimilar in appearance or size. By now he has discovered his mistake; he is therefore certain to return for the broken queen just as soon as he considers that it is safe for him to do so. For that reason alone I persuaded Jamison to send out the notice I wrote out.

"We are therefore unlikely to have a visitor before nightfall, following publication of the notice. We may as well spend the time, if you can be spared from your practice for the day, in sleep."

Shortly after eleven o'clock of the night that followed an uneventful day, I felt Pons reach out and touch me lightly on the arm.

"Don't move, Parker," he whispered, "our man is at the side window."

A slight rustling sound reached my ears. Then, in the whiteness of the fog-square of window, a figure stood for some minutes in absolute silence. Presently the window began to slide up very slowly to a quarter of its length, when there was a pause for listening. Evidently satisfied that he was unobserved, our nocturnal visitor pushed the window up as far as it could go. Again he listened for some mo-

ments; then he reached up, grasped the window-jambs, and pulled himself into the room, where he stood for a hesitant moment in the darkness, limned against the white fog outside, before he came slightly forward, walking with a pronounced, though carefully hushed, limping sound.

Without warning, Pons turned on his flash. Its bright light struck our visitor full in the face.

"Count Sergei Romanoff, I believe," said Pons. "Will you be seated?"

The Count made a tentative movement toward the window, but I was there before him, and he turned again to Pons, who had leaped to the button and illuminated the room. The Count stood blinking at Pons in the light; I noticed how well he fitted the description Pons had postulated, and saw too, several places on his chin where he had cut himself while shaving. His hair was somewhat disheveled, and his features were unnaturally pale. His firm lips trembled as he regarded Pons.

"You are not—not police?"

"We are not police."

The Count sank into a chair. "What do you want of me?"

"You came, I believe, for this," said Pons, extending his hand; the broken chessman lay in his palm.

The Count looked at Pons in sudden terror. "You are not from —the Government?"

"We are not, though we are acting in unofficial capacity for part of it."

"Ah! Who is it then! Is it Parenin? Yes, it is surely Parenin!"

"Quite so. You know M. Parenin?"

"Yes. As a boy, he was a guard in my father's house. Yes, I know him well. He was the only one in the city who knew of my identity."

"It is unnecessary to tell you that we are in possession of most of the facts of Propov's death. But tell us, how did you encounter him? That is a matter of detail about which we can only speculate."

"In the street, sir. Oh, it was foolish, but I was lonely, very lonely. Parenin could not visit me without arousing suspicion. Propov must have known me at once; he was so unnaturally gracious. I didn't recognize him then, though I knew he had been looking for me since 1923, when I was warned against him in Paris. I clipped a picture of him then; I thought I would always remember him. But he had grown a beard in the interval; so I didn't realize who he was until we sat down to that game of chess. That was his second visit to my lodgings. He was left-handed, and I remembered that Propov was left-handed. I studied him then, and I became convinced of his identity. Once convinced, I did not hesitate to kill him at once. I shaved then, you know, but that was indicative only of my despera-

tion, for I could not change my leg. And then, in my haste, I picked up the wrong chessman. You know about the diamond, too?"

Pons nodded silently.

"I had tried to put it into the king, but it would not fit; so I put it into the queen. You cannot know the bitter disappointment I suffered until I read the account in the papers this morning." He looked up, eyes narrowed. "It was not true, then? I am in the hands of the police."

"On the contrary, the account was put in expressly to enable you to retrieve the jewel."

"And so that you might take me," replied the Count bitterly.

"It becomes my duty to hand you over to the police, I fear." Pons shrugged his shoulders. "But, of course, this is your property," he continued, handing the chessman to the Count. "I will exchange it for the broken king."

The Count silently handed the king to Pons, who gave it the queen's place in his pocket.

"It will take us a few moments to notify the police, Count Romanoff," said Pons. "For your convenience, I have packed your wallet, your most valuable books, and most of your clothes."

The Count's eyes met Pons' briefly. He murmured his thanks for Pons' thoughtfulness in packing his things while I had slept. Then Pons beckoned to me.

In the hall, Pons went directly to the telephone, where he called the number the Russian consul had given him.

"M. Parenin?" I heard him say. "Solar Pons here. I called in regard to our problem of last evening. Our quarry is quite safely in our hands, but it might be well to prevent further official pursuit. Early tomorrow morning, please telephone Inspector Seymour Jamison of Scotland Yard and tell him I have delivered into your hands the man known as Landon Hall; assure the Inspector that Hall is already on his way to Russia in the hands of government agents. Above all, make certain that Inspector Jamison is to receive full credit for solving the crime at 37 Woburn Place."

There was a brief pause. Pons chuckled. "Official notice, eh? Inspector Jamison has a great respect for anything official."

Pons turned from the telephone. "I fancy that will satisfy both our client and the Inspector. Now let us see how our prisoner fares."

He looked cautiously into the Count's quarters. There was no one there.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed, "how careless of us! I am afraid our prisoner has escaped."

On the way back to our own quarters, Pons said, "We must be sure to look at the morning papers, Parker. I daresay we shall find the affair chronicled under some such caption as, shall we say, *Inspector Jamison Scores Again!*"

the sixty-eighth husband

by . . . Wenzell Brown

Of course when I married Marina I realized that she had taken the trip to the altar with some frequency but I must admit that it came as a bit of a shock when I discovered that I was her sixty-eighth husband. Not that I really minded. Most of the attractive women whom I knew had been married many times. After all that was to be expected. With a woman's span of life fifty times that of a man, no other state of affairs would make any sense.

There was a time in the world's development, so I have read, when the life expectancy of men and women differed by only a few years. Men ruled the world by force and nations vied with one another in devising monstrous weapons of war. This seems quite incredible now but it is interesting to conjecture how the world might have developed if it had not been for the discovery of the miraculous drug that is popularly known as "F".

Many centuries ago, men searched for the fountain of youth and, needless to say, never found it. "F" was discovered by a woman, a cosmetician, not a scientist. While

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What will he be like, that murderer in the Day after Tomorrow? Wenzell Brown, who will be remembered for his superb WITNESS TO MURDER (SMM, July 1958) and for his more recent report, in the first issue of the New Saint, of the secret side of life in Cuba.—now turns to this question—with extremely interesting results . . .

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experimenting with a beauty preparation she combined certain known drugs and came up with the elixir of youth quite by chance.

"F", as everyone knows, is effective with women but finds no response whatsoever in the male body. Once or twice I have tried to read up on the subject. In no time at all I got so enmeshed in medical explanations about the difference between male and female hormones that I gave up in discouragement. After all, when a man's life is so ephemeral, he should not be expected to burden himself with scientific knowledge and research.

So all I know about "F" is that annual injections of the drug preserve a woman's youth and beauty almost indefinitely while man's life span is still pretty well restricted to the biblical three score and ten. Of course this has wrought great changes in the population of the world and as time goes on the disbalance between the two sexes will become more and more marked. According to current statistics there are 34.3 women to every man. Two centuries from now it is estimated that man will become a rarity, representing one per cent of the population or even less. Marina is deeply concerned about this and with reason; it is a situation which she will live to face. As for myself, while I must look forward to a brief life, I must admit that there are compensations. A virile man is a jewel beyond worth and, if he plays his cards right, there is no reason why he should not live out his life pampered and coddled, never having to lift a finger to the lightest of menial tasks.

There is one side-effect of "F" which I have failed to mention. Women who have been inoculated with the drug have a tendency to bear only female children. This is not an inflexible rule but the preponderance of female births runs at a rate of roughly five to one.

The trend to an all-female world could be brought to an abrupt end by the discovery of the male counterpart of "F", the non-existent drug which has already been labelled "M". Vast sums of money, all the research facilities of the world, have been turned over to the quest for "M", but without even an inkling of success. The truth of the matter is that very few scientists are left. Scientific research has never been an area in which women have excelled. As for men, when life is so short, how can they be expected to dedicate themselves to the years of study and hard work required of a scientist, on the off-chance that they may stumble on the long-preserved secret of male longevity?

Now and then one runs across an exception. The most brilliant scientist of the times is, without doubt, Professor Cyril Harding. For twenty years Marina has financed his research, providing him with a gigantic laboratory and the most skilled staff that could be assem-

bled. In return she has exacted only one condition from Harding, which is that if the secret of "M" is uncovered, she shall be the first to receive the news.

Marina may not be the wealthiest woman in the world but she is certainly one of the most beautiful and talented. She was in the flush of youth when "F" was discovered, which puts her present age at a little over three hundred. Of recent years she has developed a certain plumpness but this is a matter of careless diet, rather than a sign of aging. Otherwise she looks very much like her first bridal pictures taken when she was twenty.

Marina accumulated her wealth without apparent effort. Naturally today virtually all real estate, industry and even agricultural lands are in the hands of women who inherited them from their erstwhile spouses. Marina, I must say, was practical about her early marriages. Her first dozen or so of husbands were business tycoons of one sort or another but, even though the bulk of her wealth was inherited, I would be the first to admit that Marina has an instinctual grasp of high finance which is belied by her pleasantly buxom figure and her innocent blue eyes. Marina always knows what she wants and takes the correct steps to achieve her ends.

I might take myself as an example. Marina laid claim to me while I was still a toddler. She saw to it from the beginning that the more masculine facets of my personality were suppressed. Luxury is a very mild term for the conditions under which I was reared. From my earliest memory, there was no physical comfort which I could envisage with which I was not supplied. The softest of blankets. The best of food. The most delightful of toys. Yet Marina exerted a sort of discipline, too. She was indifferent to me as a child and thought of me only as a potential man. I was raised with the suffocating care of a hot-house plant, so precious that should it perish it could not be replaced. No rough games. No male companionship. No formal education that might permit me to stand on my own feet. On every side I was hedged in from sickness or danger. Any injury to me might frustrate Marina's plans.

I cannot truthfully state that I found this pattern of living vexatious. Life is fleeting for a man, finished in a few brief years, so why should one be laden down with study, work or self-discipline? Sometimes Marina, or my female attendants, would tell me of the old days when men ruled the earth. It all sounded pretty horrible, that I must admit. Wars in which thousands were killed. Savage sport spectacles where men pummelled each other mercilessly or dragged one another in the mud fighting over a pigskin ball. The streets of the big cities were bare, unlined with flower beds. Architecture was

stark and naked. Violence and crime were rampant. Men actually fought over women and even spent their lives in drudgery to support them.

How different things are now, when the mere fact of being a male means cherishing care from the cradle to the grave. True, as Professor Harding likes to point out, technological progress came to an abrupt standstill with the discovery of "F". Worse than that, a great deal of scientific knowledge has been lost to the world. Industrialization suffered a setback. Today the jet airliners remain idle for competent women pilots are rare and it would be sacrilege to endanger the life of a man in such a hazardous occupation. Even the city busses, with their chintz-curtained windows, their rose colored velvet seats and perfumed interiors, are understaffed.

Marina likes to chide Professor Harding, pointing out that while the secrets of nuclear weapons have been forgotten, we are all the more secure for the loss. Indeed, there has been no threat of war for close to three centuries. If few new skyscrapers arise, there is compensation in the comfortable homes that women have wrought. Comfort is the key word in modern existence. Think of the old days, she always says with a smile, when men worked long hours in mines, factories, even in slave labor camps. Today a man need never work at all unless he is so inclined. There are always a dozen women eager to take care of him.

Professor Harding growls at that, saying there's more to life than easy living and luxury, that man was meant to work. In the end, though, Marina always wins him over. She has an irresistible charm and I have noticed that for all his vaunted masculinity, the Professor likes to bask in Marina's gardens, eat her elaborate dinners and drink her choice wines.

My marriage to Marina took place on my twentieth birthday, nearly five years ago. I must admit that Marina has been a more than tolerant wife. She has never scolded me for my occasional dalliances with other women but has taken them as a matter of course. She knows perfectly well the constant temptations placed in the path of a presentable male and even takes a certain pride in the unconcealed covetousness of others of her sex. But I am under no illusions about my position in her household. I am a pampered lap-dog and Marina is fully aware that I would be at a complete loss without the background of wealth and luxury with which she has provided me.

As I have already pointed out, up until the time of my marriage I had no male associates. Since then chance has thrown me into companionship with Cyril Harding. The Professor is fifty-six, but he is gray and a little bent. He looks old

enough to be Marina's father and indeed he has assumed the role of father-substitute which so many women crave.

Harding is a bit of a curmudgeon and has often frightened me. For a time he tried to bully me into taking my studies seriously so that I could follow in his footsteps as a scientist whose principal objective was the search for "M". When that failed, he talked about sports, manliness and hard work. His piercing eyes made me shudder away from him. Yet strangely enough there were occasions when he touched some atavistic streak in me, when I took a swift glowing pride in my masculinity. I caught a vision of a day when man would come back to his own and would rule the world, forcing women into the subordinate position which they held in past centuries.

The flame of rebellion never lasted very long. Marina would see to that. She was an expert at sizing up my moods and ingenius at allaying any uneasiness or distress on my part. She would dose me with tranquilizing drugs, prepare sumptious banquets for me with exotic liqueurs and always there was the choice of women, eagerly responsive to my slightest whim. When finally I was ready for my bed, with its foam rubber mattress, Marina would come and sit beside me in the dark, stroking my hair.

"Jamie," she would say, "you really mustn't take Professor Harding so seriously. Supposing he did discover 'M', do you realize what it would mean? The proportion of men and women would be equalized again. Would you really like to work in a grubby office or factory? Even a coal mine? Once there were enough men on the earth, war would be a certainty. Do you want to fight, be killed?" There was never any answer to that. I'd roll over and let Marina cradle me in her arms.

That was the way things stood until today at noon. I'd just finished breakfast in bed and had come downstairs in silk pajamas and robe to locate Marina and find out what plans she had made for my day. I heard her voice in the glass room that is filled with orchids and tropical flowers. I reached the open door before I heard the rumble of a masculine voice, that of Cyril Harding. Something about the intensity of his speech stopped me in my tracks. I only heard a few scraps of sentences but enough to know the reason for his excitement. His experiments with "M" were reaching a successful conclusion.

He looked up and saw me standing in the doorway. His voice dropped off in mid-sentence and he stared at me, his mouth open. Marine turned in my direction. She was smiling, "Come in, Jamie. Cyril has wonderful news. Success, at last. He's discovered 'M'."

"No, Marina," Harding said with

a touch of asperity, "that's not quite true. I've been on the trail of 'M' for a long time. Now I think, I'm virtually certain, that I hold the secret in my hand. But there's one last experiment to make. Tonight I'll know."

Marina caressed his gnarled hand. "And you've kept your promise, Cyril? You've told no one but me?"

Harding stiffened a little. "Of course," he said. "Did you ever know me to violate my word. But Jamie's in on the secret now."

Marina laughed lightly and came over to stand beside me. "Don't worry about Jamie, Professor. Our secret's safe enough with him. Now I want one more promise, that you won't discuss this with anyone else until after dinner. We must celebrate by ourselves and then decide on the best way to let the world learn of your momentous achievement."

Harding agreed, a bit glumly, I thought, and rose to go. Marina went with him to the door and I heard her tinkling voice say, "Cocktails at seven, Professor. I'll be expecting you."

Marina came back and kissed me on the mouth. I was shaking with excitement and wanted to talk. "Marina, what does this mean—"

She cut me off by placing her fingers across my lips. "Don't you worry, Jamie. Everything will come out all right. I'll see to that. You just be here for cocktails tonight." Then she was gone and though I called her name several times, she did not return.

I spent the afternoon in alternate moods of elation and depression. Professor Harding's discovery would herald a new world, or perhaps a reversion to a much older one. I wasn't sure how I felt about it but there was nothing I could do anyway.

At a quarter of seven I entered the lounge. Marina was already there. A maid had just placed a cocktail shaker in front of her and was withdrawing. Marina patted the love seat beside her and I went to sit with her. She began talking to me in those soft hypnotic tones which she always employs when she wishes to bend me to her will. It is a voice that I can never resist. "This mustn't happen, Jamie. It's unthinkable. The beautiful, comfortable, peaceful world that women have built will soon be destroyed."

Her soft words went on and on but I was too confused to follow them. All that I caught was a familiar key word here and there—"war—bayonets—bombs—ugliness—work—competition—the end of luxury."

She paused to give me time to collect my thoughts. "You can see I've got to stop Cyril, can't you, Jamie?"

I nodded in agreement as I always did when she talked to me like this. Maybe it really was a form

of hypnosis that she practiced. I can't be sure. "Yes, you're right," I gasped. "But what can you do?"

Marina was gay again and her laughter tinkled. "That's easy, Jamie. Just watch." She took a mosaic pill case from her purse, opened it and removed a tiny white pellet. "Poison," she said softly. "Tasteless, painless and it leaves no trace." She reached over to the cocktail glass on the stand beside Professor Harding's favorite chair. Her hand flitted over the rim and her fingers opened. The tiny pill dropped into the amber fluid and dissolved.

I was still watching the glass in fascination when there was a metallic click from the gate that separated the laboratory from Marina's garden. She leaped to her feet and stroked my cheek, saying, "You know, Jamie, when in doubt it's always best to preserve the status quo. Now, I'll run along and meet Cyril."

I was alone with the poisoned cocktail. Sudden panic sliced at me and I lunged to my feet and stumbled to the window. The purple haze of early evening spread over the garden but I could still see Professor Harding clearly. He was walking with head high and shoulders thrown back. There was something proud and defiant in his masculinity and it struck a responding chord in me. We were men and soon the world could be ours again. We needed no longer to be pampered lap dogs at the beck and call of women. We would be the masters, strong, dominant, asserting our right to be rulers of the world.

The fate of mankind rested in my hands. All that I needed to do was shift the poisoned cocktail to Marina's place. She had been so sure of her hypnotic power but I had shaken the spell.

I strode back to the center of the room and looked down at the poisoned glass. My fingers moved toward it. Then all of Marina's words came flooding back. A world ruled by men, scrambling for power. The end of comfort, ease, luxury. How could I stand up to such a world?

I heard a little whimpering cry come from my throat. The decision was too big to make so quickly. But it must be made now. I had a minute, maybe less.

Their heels are clicking on the flagged walk and I can hear Marina's gay chit-chat and low pitched laughter. Only a few seconds before they will mount the porch stairs and appear in the open doorway.

There is still time to act. But I must make up my mind.

What *shall* I do?

the three thieves

by . . . Charlotte and Dan Ross

IT WAS AN AGE of violence. And the three men who had come out of the black and cold night were bent on robbery. Their leader, known in the underworld as the Big One, strode slowly across the shadowed, low-ceilinged room to face the graybeard innkeeper, who stood expectantly by the fireplace. Except for the aged proprietor and a thin, old woman who dozed on a bench before the blazing logs, the place was deserted.

The Big One, a giant of a man more than six feet tall and still rugged despite his gray hair, frowned at the withered old man before him. "We want food." His voice, deep-toned and harsh, made even the simplest statement a command.

The innkeeper bowed servilely. "If you will be seated," he said in a reedy voice, "I will prepare dinner for your party at once."

The Big One scowled at him without answering. It was a habit. He knew his broad, ugly face with its shaggy gray brows and cruel thick lips, always brought him fearful respect from strangers. Every-

Readers of this magazine will recall David Alexander's superb SOMETHING IN THE AIR, in our Jan. 1958 issue, which recreated, in terms of these days, the tension in the air as the Child was born. Chadlotte and Dan Ross now tell, what happened to that inn in Bethlehem—and to one man—in the years and decades that followed. . . . .

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thing about the Big One was menacing and evil, except his deep-set burning eyes. And these you didn't notice right away. But on close inspection they seemed to be flecked by a certain hint of compassion.

The Big One grunted and turned to his companions as the innkeeper hurried to a back room to make ready their meal.

Red Beard, whose reputation as a thief was widespread, complained in his usual loud, querulous tone: "Had you searched throughout Judea you could not have come upon a more mangy hole!"

The Big One ignored this comment and, seating himself heavily at the long wooden table, rested his head on his arm in utter weariness. Red Beard, who had a slight limp, hobbled over and sat near him, staring disconsolately at the doorway through which the innkeeper had vanished.

The third thief was young and slender with a short brown beard. He seemed better dressed and a different type from the other two, as indeed he was. It had only been a few months since he had joined them—not to share in the profits of their crimes but because heart-sick of solitary wandering he craved companionship, even at the price of becoming the associate of outlaws.

He studied his companions from his stand at the fireplace and sighed. He was lucky they accepted his company. Not many others would. Lepers were not popular. These two were satisfied that he kept his right hand concealed within the folds of his flowing blue robe —the right hand whose palm was a hideous festering sore.

When he'd first discovered the leprosy he concealed it from his wealthy merchant father as well as from the lovely young girl in a neighboring village who was his betrothed. Shock and pride made him flee from the comfort of a luxurious home and the bright promise of his coming marriage. He could not bring himself to face their heartbreak and pity. And so he became a wanderer.

For a time he found partial escape in new surroundings and so kept constantly on the move. Always careful to avoid anyone who might take back word of having seen him. And then the loneliness became so intense he knew he must find some kind of company if he were to keep his sanity. In the underworld bazaar of a great city he had met the Big One and Red Beard.

Now the old woman huddled before the slackening fire coughed dryly several times without opening her eyes. The young man regarded her with pity. He hoped the Big One would not be too hard on the innkeeper, who would be her husband. The Big One often threatened his victims with death and the young man knew that in the past the giant thief had murdered many. And so whenever his rage was

aroused the young man stood by in fear. Yet so far, experience had shown that while he robbed and threatened, he rarely killed.

The innkeeper entered with a heaping tray of food and placed it on the long wooden table. The Big One roused himself and began to eat. Red Beard and the young leper joined him.

Munching on a choice bit of meat, Red Beard observed: "The victuals are better than the surroundings, that is certain!"

Standing by, the aged innkeeper gave a feeble smile of pleasure. "Thank you, sir. This inn has always been noted for its table. We had a busy place here once before the camel caravans stopped using the route through the town."

The Big One raised his head and growled: "Made money, eh?"

The innkeepers thin hands worked nervously. "That was years ago, you understand. Now we get a very few. But it is enough for my wife and me to finish our days." The gray beard turned toward the motionless, bent figure sitting before the fireplace, "You will excuse her, good sirs. She is stone deaf."

The young man silently helped himself to the food, eating with his left hand. The leprous one was never revealed, except those times in the night when he'd uncover it and stare in frightened revulsion.

He knew what the Big One's next move would be. As soon as they had finished the meal he would go after the old man for whatever he had in money or anything else worth taking.

The innkeeper rambled on in his shaky tones: "Yes, my wife and I have had good, busy lives, and now we are grateful to be quiet. Still occasional guests like yourselves are most welcome."

"You will surely remember our visit until your last hour," the young man thought grimly as he stared at his empty plate. The Big One nudged him and jerked his head for him to take up guard at the door. The youth left the table without a word.

And now Red Beard got up and took a stand behind the sleeping woman's bench.

The Big One rose and confronted the innkeeper. And the old man apparently sensed the unusual for the first time.

"Will you be staying the night?" he quavered. "I will make ready for you."

The Big One towered above him, his face dark and ugly. He grasped the feeble throat in his massive gnarled hands and thundered: "You know what we are after! Don't play the fool! Gold! Where do you keep it?"

Pawing desperately at the crushing hands, the innkeeper croaked: "There is no gold! We are poor! Very poor. Only the building left! Everything else I have sold."

"A likely story!" raged the Big One, increasing the pressure on the

old man's throat until his speech was shut off in a gurgling. Then, before his victim collapsed completely, he released his hands and taking the old man roughly by the shoulders, shook him. "Come now," he thundered, "no more waiting. Tell us where you keep your gold and valuables."

"Believe me," the innkeeper pleaded in a hoarse whisper, "there is nothing."

The young man, looked on with a sick feeling, know what would likely happen next.

"Then your wife will tell us," the Big One motioned. "Red Beard, you use your charms on the hag."

Red Beard grinned, revealing his uneven yellowed teeth. He stepped close to the still dozing woman.

"No!" the innkeeper's voice raised in a shrill appeal, "Don't touch her! I will tell you! I will tell you!"

"Wait!" the Big One ordered his henchman, and then to the trembling innkeeper. "I am listening."

"I lied," the old man said brokenly. "I still have a small portion of my riches. Two giant golden candlesticks. And they shall be yours if only you do not harm her."

"Where are they?"

"In my stable."

Red Beard shouted with derisive laughter. "In his stable! The old one's playing you for a fool!"

The Big One scowled at the shaken figure of his victim: "So you keep your precious golden candlesticks in a stable? What's the trick? I warn you. We are in no mood for games."

Thin hands raised in a plea. "I will explain, and then you will know why, and that I am telling the truth."

The young man saw that the innkeeper was indeed sincere, and even the Big One seemed willing to hear him out. Only Red Beard was impatient.

"Twist his neck," he cried angrily, "we'll find whatever is here."

"No!" The old man protested. "You see it is a custom of mine this night in the year to set out my candlesticks on a white linen cloth in a certain manger of my stable. I have done it for nearly half a century in honor of an event that took place here many years ago."

The Big One growled. "I say you lie!"

"It is the truth," the innkeeper protested. "We were very busy then. The inn was filled. And when this poor family came we did not want to turn them away. So we gave them the use of the stable. During the night a son was born. And three Kings came to pay the child homage and brought precious gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. I will never forget it."

Red Beard jeered, "The old man's head is filled with cobwebs like his inn."

"It was a wondrous sight," the innkeeper said, "and for years after the family left I followed their for-

tunes. The son grew up to become a great teacher and leader. In the end it was his undoing. He caused political unrest. They crucified him."

The old man sighed before he went on. "It was a pity. So much good might have come of his life. In my heart I suppose I have never given up hope that somehow his teachings will be remembered. And that is why I have always paid honor to the night of his birth."

The young leper had an impulse to speak. "He is surely telling the truth! While I do not know about the teacher of whom he speaks, I can see that he is not lying."

The Big One hesitated a moment and then pushed the innkeeper toward Red Beard. "Watch him, he ordered, and went to the door, telling the young man as he passed: "Come with me."

There was a cold breeze as they walked across the courtyard to the stable. As they neared the small building, the young man saw with a sense of relief the faint glow of shimmering orange marking its entrance against the blackness of the night. The innkeeper had told the truth.

When he saw it, the Big One hesitated, and his half-raised hands were clenched. "Bethlehem!" he murmured. "It is the town!"

And then they were inside the stable and before them, in a manger, they saw a white cloth spread out. On it, tall gleaming candlesticks were set, and the white candle flame flickered in a slight stir of air. The Big One made no move to seize the old man's remaining treasure. He stood there, silently staring at the simple tribute to the memory of a night long ago.

As the young leper watched, the Big One dropped to his knees before the lighted candles, while large tears ran down his coarse cheeks. Embarassed at the strangeness of it, the young man moved back to the stable entrance and stared out at the far-off stars.

It was at this moment he became aware of a familiar scent in the air. The scent of perfumes he'd known when he worked in his father's warehouse—frankincense and also myrhh. There was no mistaking them. And weren't those among the gifts the innkeeper said the three kings had brought? He turned and went back to the manger before which the Big One still knelt. And here the fragrance of the perfumes filled the musty place. And without quite understanding why, he found himself dropping to his knees beside the Big One.

The rustle of the breeze that stirred the candles' flame seemed to bring with it a soothing sound like faint, far-off music that gave ease from the inner torment of pain and unhappiness he'd known so long. How many minutes they knelt there, he could not tell.

The spell was broken by Red

Beard appearing in the doorway with the innkeeper by the arm. "What foolishness is this?" he demanded. "I thought you had come to harm."

The Big One rose and swinging around, ordered Red Beard: "Let him go!"

The indignant Red Beard gaped. "Let him go?"

The young man who was also on his feet now said: "You heard the order. Must everything be told you three times."

Red Beard let go the frightened innkeeper and grumbled. "Very well. Let's get the candlesticks and be on our way."

"Leave them!" The Big One glowered at Red Beard and walked off into the courtyard. Crying a string of protests, the disgruntled Red Beard went after him. The young man followed slowly. He turned as they came to the road and had a last glimpse of the innkeeper silhouetted against the faint glow of the stable entrance.

They trudged along the hilly, winding course that would bring them to the next village. The Big One stalked firmly in the lead, followed by the young man, and the complaining Red Beard trailed in the rear.

As they walked the young man became aware that the feeling of peace that had filled him in the stable was still with him. A kind of understanding that changed his bitterness and even let him see the others in a different light. The Big One had a good streak, he'd proved that tonight. And Red Beard was more stupid than evil. Give either of them a fresh start and they could lead decent lives. But how could two such criminals be given a fresh start?

And then he had the answer. He could do it for them. If he took them to his home village his father would be too happy at his return to refuse any favor. Even finding a place for the two in his trading business.

And he suddenly realized it was right. Right that he should go back and tell his father the truth and ask his forgiveness. Right that he should see his sweetheart again so that she would understand and not think of their love harshly. Even though his future could not be linked with hers, they might both still find fulfillment, she in her world and he in his.

His would be the world of the lepers—physical and moral. The unfortunate and rejected thousands who cried out in their need. Surely he in some small way could bring friendship, help and courage to at least a few.

So the beginning would be here and now. The Big One halted as they came to the crest of a hill, and stood looking out over the fields below.

In the light of the star-filled sky they could see, far off, the faint forms of shepherds and their flock

of sheep huddled close on a rocky hillside. The Big One stared across the night at them.

And the young leper took his chance to speak: "I remember," he said, "I have an Uncle who lives on a farm not more than a mile from here. I had not planned to visit him. But since we have no place to go I think it would be a good idea."

Red Beard was loud in agreement. "At least we'll have a place to rest our heads." And jerking a thumb at the silent Big One, who stood etched against the sky line a figure of stone, he went on to grumble: "Depend on him and we'll finish with nothing. They warned me against him. Take the way he acted about those candlesticks. Little that they were we could have had them but for him. He's not the same any more. The way he acted you'd think that stable was some sacred place!"

The young man stretched out his right hand, so its open palm was clearly visible under the starlight. The hideous mark of leprosy was still there. And he mused: "If this had truly been a sacred place, surely through some miracle the leprosy would have been cured." And then he understood. The miracle *had* taken place, but in his heart rather than his hand.

And with a wistful smile he turned to Red Beard and said quietly: "What makes you so sure it isn't? That he isn't right—our *Barabbas*. . . . ."

AND IN SAN QUENTIN. . . .

Diamanto Samartzi was thirteen years old recently and will soon celebrate her third anniversary as a protege of the inmates of San Quentin. As reported in the September 14, 1961, issue of the *San Quentin News*, it had been decided in a recent poll taken by the Inmate Council to hold another fund-raising drive for the little Greek girl first adopted through The Foster Parent's Plan in 1958. More than $1,400 was raised in a cell-to-cell canvass at that time. Both of the child's parents are invalids and there are several other children in the family. Thanks to the help from San Quentin, the girl has been able to stay in school in Greece.

There were three issues up for vote in the recent poll. The final results were:

1. To keep Diamanto until she is 18 years old.	Yes — 3,722.	No — 100
2. To turn over whatever funds may be left to her when she reaches the age of 18.	Yes — 3,457.	No — 447
3. To adopt an additional needy child (after the fund-raising drive for Diamanto is completed)	Yes — 3,071.	No — 426

The same issue reports how the print shop pressroom leadman had been paroled the week before, after sending out approximately 130 letters seeking employment. He'd hesitated to contact the firm he'd been working for at the time of his arrest but did so, finally, after 130 "duds". The reply, offering him a job as pressman, said in part, ". . . we are happy to re-employ you because your past work with us was excellent." And that was that. . . .

proof positive

by . . . Donald A. Yates

PROFESSOR SIMON THURMAN, teacher of freshman composition and allied subjects at the City College was this afternoon enjoying an unusual deviation from his academic routine. It was the first day of his summer vacation. The last blue book had been corrected, the last hastily assembled term paper had been read and assigned a grade, and the final results had been turned into the English Department's secretary. On this very warm, summery afternoon, as he strolled purposefully along a drowsing city street, he felt quite free and unencumbered. The briefcase he carried was not filled with papers to be corrected; its contents were of a much more personal and exciting nature. And, interestingly enough, on the first day of his vacation, Professor Thurman was going to jail.

Well, not *into* jail, precisely. That, however, was what he had told his wife that morning; he had reminded her that that afternoon he was going to jail, and they had enjoyed the little joke. But if the truth be told, the professor was merely making a trip to the police precinct station.

Dr. Donald A. Yates, translator of Maria Elvira Bermudez, Antonio Helu, Alfonso Ferrari Amores, and other distinguished Latin American writers in this field, has himself written several stories in this medium. His INSPECTOR'S LUNCH, published in the March 1959 issue of The Saint Magazine *has since then been anthologized.*

When he finally turned off of the sweltering street at his destination, his steps brought him before the police desk sergeant.

Sergeant Meehan glanced up at the professor's arrival with tentative good-will, but his attitude quickly degenerated into one of annoyance when he observed that the fragile-looking little man was managing to appear quite cool and comfortable in a starched dark suit, shirt, tie, and all.

"Well?" the sergeant said.

"I should like to see your detective inspector of homicide, please," the professor stated.

"Who's that?"

"The detective inspector of—"

"Oh, Lieutenant Glover?" The sergeant's easily read mood perceptibly cracked and then sweetened a bit with the news that this was apparently a business call and not the cause for a sudden alarm. The thought of any deliberate action in the oppressive heat genuinely saddened him.

"May I ask what this is about?" said the sergeant.

Professor Thurman hugged his briefcase to his chest and answered in a confidential tone. "Well, you see, I've been planning for some time to write a novel. It's a—er—a detective novel, you understand. It's something I've worked on for some time now. I thought that the lieutenant could help me a bit with some of the terminology and—lingo."

The sergeant nodded, manifesting a polite show of interest. "Does Lieutenant Glover know you're coming?"

"Well, yes, several days ago I wrote him about my plans and he said he was perfectly willing to—"

The balance of this explanation was not immediately discernible, for at this moment, from up the stairway leading to the sergeant's central desk there came a group of five men, two police officers and three casually dressed citizens. The latter trio was protesting in loud, indignant tones. The professor hastily retreated to a bench along the wall from which vantage point he observed with open interest as the smallest of these three, a very hot and excited fellow, suddenly eluded the grip of his captor and ran up to the desk. There was a mask of desperation over his features.

"Sarge, please listen to me! These guys don't understand. I didn't do anything!" The man looked to be in his late thirties but he had the physical energy of a younger person. He whirled around hopefully to see if his appeal to a higher authority had had any dramatic effect on his captors, and in doing so his eyes fell on Professor Thurman. A lightning flash of surprise struck his face. He seemed visibly to waver for a moment, then seemed to make a quick decision. He turned imploringly full on the professor and exclaimed, "Believe me! I don't know nothing!"

"Book 'em," said the officer who was apparently in charge of the party. "We nabbed all three of 'em together in back of Dino's Place. Doing a little business with the numbers. We picked up a load of cards and a bundle of cash, too."

The agitated man was unrestrainable. "I'm innocent!" he cried. "Please listen to me. *I don't know nothing!*" Once again he turned to Professor Thurman, of all people, for some sort of help.

Suddenly, the professor knew he had seen the fellow before.

"That's right," chimed in one of his companions. "None of us does. You boys got things all wrong."

"Sure, sure," agreed the officer with easy patience. "These two were thumbing through the cash and the little guy here we caught in the next room on the phone. Book 'em all."

Professor Thurman, forgotten for the moment, sat pensively at the fringe of the scene while the formality of registering the suspects was being carried out.

Yes, he *did* know the man from somewhere. He was sure of it. Now, *where?* That was the question. It must have been—Yes, of course! In one of his classes! He frowned at the thought of one of his students falling into disfavor with the law. Wait. Now that helped a bit—*trouble.* His orderly mind clicked back over a series of classes, school years, faces—Now he remembered! An earnest young student in a first year composition course, a hard worker, but with a sketchy background. From a rather tough east side high school. The name he could not remember. But part of the total recall he sought was coming back to him. It must have been fifteen years ago, at least.

He doubted now that the boy had finished the course with him. He began to remember that part, too. There had been trouble—trouble in the family. Sickness or something of the sort. He had dropped out of school and had disappeared into the obscurity of the east side slums.

And here he was again, popping up to the surface. An arresting thought suddenly occurred to him. Could it be that—It *was* possible, he considered. With a certain professional pride he reflected that some things never change . . .

In a matter of minutes, the three men were led away and the professor was back at Sergeant Meehan's desk, waiting while the anguished echo of the little man's *"I don't know nothing!"* had died down along the halls.

"The short man is a bookie?" the professor asked.

"No. Whay?" replied the sergeant.

"I thought I heard one of the arresting officers refer to him as—"

The sergeant chuckled. "Ha, that's pretty good. No, his nickname is Bennie the Bookworm, not Bennie the Bookie." He allowed

himself to enjoy the professor's confusion.

"An odd sobriquet—eh, nickname," Professor Thurman commented.

"Huh? Oh, yeah. No, Bennie's just what you'd call a wee bit shady. We know him around here. Never into serious trouble. He just travels with the wrong kind of friends."

The professor nodded. "His nickname interests me," he persisted.

"Well, he's supposed to be pretty well educated. Spent some time in college, they say. Anyway, he's supposed to read lots of books."

"I see," said Professor Thurman. He thought for a moment. "Sergeant, will all three of those men be placed in the same—eh, cell?"

"Probably. Why do you want to know?"

By now the professor had made his decision. Without further hesitation, he replied: "Sergeant I think I'd like to speak with Lieutenant Glover immediately, if you would be so kind. I assure this is most important."

What happened after that was genuinely astonishing. In rapid succession: Professor Thurman conferred briefly with the precinct's Lieutenant Glover, the three suspects were casually intercepted and placed in widely separated cells, Bennie the Bookworm was secretly slipped out for a conference with the lieutenant and, minutes later, was headed full speed—courtesy of the precinct—in a patrol car for St. Lawrence Hospital where he managed to arrive in time to be present in a sixth floor ward for a wondrous event.

Back at the precinct station, in the wake of this whirlwind of events, three men stood talking beside Sergeant Meehan's desk.

"If you don't mind my asking, Lieutenant," said Meehan, "how did the professor here know that Bennie's wife was going to have a baby—their first one, at that?"

Lieutenant Glover, normally a taciturn soul, smiled. "Very clever," he said.

"It was a simple matter, sergeant," offered Professor Thurman. "Really it was." His fundamental modesty seemed taxed at this point, however, and he did not elucidate.

Lieutenant Glover intervened. "Benny told us the whole story after we got him alone," he continued. "The numbers charge will stick, of course, against the two others. But Bennie was innocent, and they know it. But, naturally, under the circumstances Bennie wouldn't ask for special treatment. It would have looked as if he were going to welsh on the others—behind their backs. He realized this all along. All he wanted to do was to get a chance to be alone with someone long enough to explain that he had just stopped by at Dino's to make a call home—to check on how his wife was feeling."

"And she was about due, eh?" asked the sergeant.

"Actually," Glover replied, "she had just left for the hospital with a friend. Bennie talked with a neighbor. We checked this out and it cleared him on the phone call."

"No wonder he was sweating it out when they brought him in."

"Right," said Glover. "He was clean, no doubt about that. But he had to prove it, he had to talk to someone *immediately*—without giving the impression that he was trying to squeal on his friends. A tricky situation, to say the least."

Professor Thurman, obviously pleased with his afternoon's work so far, spoke up at this point, humbly adopting the objective style of classroom presentation. "This was when I played my unanticipated role. As it happens, Bennie had once been a student of mine in a composition class. He recognized me. Now you recall that he insisted over and again, *specifically to me*—these were his exact words—*'I don't know nothing!'* This involves, gramatically speaking, the use of the double negative. By saying 'I don't know nothing', technically you are saying 'I know something.' Two negatives, as it were, make a positive—as in mathematics.

"When I finally figured out that Bennie had been a student of mine, I gave him credit for knowing exactly what he was saying. If I taught him," Professor Thurman added parenthetically, "he would have remembered. Apparently, he knew something, but it was something that he could only get across to us privately and without making it seem to his companions that he wanted to talk behind their backs. That, of course," the professor said with compassion, "wouldn't have looked good at all."

"Clever, didn't I tell you?" said Glover to Sergeant Meehan. The lieutenant placed an arm confidentially around Professor Thurman's shoulder and indicated the way to his office. "Shall we talk a bit about your book now, professor?" he suggested in a friendly manner. "About underworld lingo, you said?"

Sergeant Meehan shook his head. "Bennie was lucky you just happened to be here, professor," he said in farewell.

Professor Thurman turned back momentarily. "Actually, it's rather strange, sergeant," he replied. "I came here to learn something about slang. But as it turned out, Bennie was lucky mainly because"—and here his eye twinkled—"we both spoke the same language."

death in the night

by . . . Lawrence G. Blochman

SEPTEMBER CAME to Calcutta, bringing with it the last of the hot monsoon rains, the first of the annoying clouds of green flies, and Alfred Nealy.

Nealy arrived in state on the Burma Mail steamer, with two bearers and a gold-headed walking stick. He bought drinks lavishly in the best oases, from Firpo's to the Grand Hotel bar, inquiring constantly for the whereabouts of one James Crispin. After a week he moved from the Great Eastern, with only one bearer, to Spence's, still seeking Crispin. By the end of the month he was living in a frowzy boarding house in Dharmtola Street, servantless, and without his gold-headed cane. He was frequenting the Savoy and lesser bars now, often getting himself invited to drink with the ease of manner that bespoke extensive experience. He asked all he met if they had not come across James Crispin—a tall, rather slender blond chap with big gray eyes and a fresh, probably large scar on his forehead.

One day an Anglo-Indian surveyor told Nealy he knew of a man answering that description, but

It is hard to realize that it was only yesterday—oh well, the day before yesterday—this world which Alfred Nealy knew and about which Lawrence G. Blochman writes. So much has happened in these last decades—so many ways of life have been swept away—never to return—including, perhaps, this Code, unique to this world. . . .

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that his name was Christopher James. He had recently gone to the western Bengal coal fields on some sort of a geological mission, the surveyor said. Nealy scurried after additional information, sold all his belongings except the mussy white suit he wore, bought a round-trip ticket to Asansol, and left Calcutta that night.

From Asansol Nealy rode in a creaking *gharri* for two hours over bone-cracking roads through blinding sunshine. On a little knoll a mile beyond the sun-baked mud village of Mardipur he saw the house that had been described to him as occupied by Christopher James. It was a glaringly white bungalow surrounded by a low, glaringly white wall. Several stiff talipot palms grew in the compound. At the gate an elderly Sikh was squatting in the dust, the corners of his square gray beard twisted into knots, a faded rag of a red turban piled on his head. His cheeks puffed out as he blew a wheedling tune on a gourd instrument, his eyes fixed on a cobra coiled in the sunlight before him, head raised, hood extended. The Sikh's right knee, shiny and brown as it protruded from his tattered *dhoti,* moved to and fro in rhythm with his music. The cobra swayed to the same cadence.

Nealy paid his *gharri-walla,* passed the snake charmer with hardly a glance, and sauntered up the path toward a verandah where a tall, rather pale man of about thirty-five sat in khaki shorts reading the *dak* edition of a calcutta newspaper. Peering over the top of his paper, the man on the verandah caught sight of the red-faced figure in a crumpled, sweat-soiled duck suit approaching. A wave of color swept over his face, tinting on his high forehead a large irregular scar like the petal of a crimson rose. Nealy noticed that he wore a leather revolver holster.

"Hello, Crispin," said Nealy. "Or would you rather have me call you Christopher James?"

The man on the verandah shrugged his shoulders.

"Suit yourself," he said. "What are you doing here?"

"I've come to see you," Nealy replied. "I'm going to be your guest for a while."

"You can't stay here," said Crispin curtly.

"Yes, I can," was the glib rejoinder.

Crispin's refusal was not repeated. Nealy drew up a chair for himself, sat down at a table opposite Crispin, and tossed his grimy topee to the door. His black hair was thick and crinkly, and had begun to gray at the temples. Perspiration was collecting in two deep furrows on his brow. He wiped it away with a frayed sleeve.

"Can't a fellow get a drink around here?" he asked.

"I suppose so," said Crispin. He

raised his voice: "Narab Singh!"

The Sikh squatting by the gate looked up, still playing his gourd instrument.

"Bring another *chota peg*. This sahib is thirsty."

The Sikh removed the cover from a round, flat basket. He droned a few more notes, and the cobra glided into the basket, coiling itself. Narab Singh replaced the cover, took the basket under his arm, and went into the bungalow.

"Is that Sikh snake charmer your bearer?" inquired Nealy.

"My bearer is in the village today," Crispin replied. "Narab Singh is my *durwan*."

"First time I ever heard of an Indian servant doing a job that wasn't his by title," said Nealy. "Like asking a Hindu cook to wait table. It isn't done."

"Narab Singh is always doing jobs that aren't his, out of gratitude," said Crispin. "He was pretty sick a few weeks back, and I got the railway doctor up from Asansol to cure him. He says I saved his life."

"See that he isn't too saving with the Scotch," said Nealy as the Sikh reappeared with another glass, a decanter of whisky and a bottle of soda.

Crispin took up his newspaper again while Nealy emptied his glass without taking a breath, motioning to the Sikh to refill it.

"I see you've quit the ruby fields for the coal fields," Nealy commented, wiping his mouth.

"Obviously," said Crispin, behind his paper.

"Find the climate of Bengal is a lot healthier than the climate of Burma right now, don't you," Nealy continued.

Crispin lowered his paper and regarded his visitor in silence.

"You sure made a quick getaway from Rangoon," Nealy went on. "Disappeared even before the body was cold. I figured you got a ship out the same night. Neat work. When I found out you were in Calcutta I wanted to come over and compliment you, but I couldn't raise the cash for the trip right off. You know, Crispin, even a professional moocher can't always get his fingers on a good-sized wad —without murdering somebody."

Crispin brought his hands together with a nervous movement that crumpled his newspaper.

"So you've come here to haunt me like Mott's ghost?" he asked in a tired voice. Then his words sounded a note of growing anger as he protested: "But you know I'm not a murderer, Nealy. You know I didn't kill Mott in cold blood. You were there during that crazy quarrel. You saw Mott attack me. You know that this scar on my forehead is his work. It was his own gun that killed him—you know that, too. It went off while I was trying to take it away from him, trying to save myself. I was

acting in self defense. You know that. You know it, Nealy, you saw it all."

Crispin was pleading. Nealy's expression did not change. He looked at Crispin with small black eyes that were very close together. There were lines at the corners of his mouth that gave him the appearance of always smiling cynically.

"If you were in the clear," he asked, "why did you skip the country?"

Crispin's heavy eyelids dropped for a moment. There was a haunted look in his eyes when he opened them again. He lifted his hands in a listless, bewildered gesture.

"God knows," he said. "I don't know why I ran away from Burma. Panic, maybe. The sight of blood. I went to pieces. The thought of having snuffed out a life that I had shared . . . I don't know. . . ."

"You'd have a hard time explaining all that to the Bengali police officers," said Nealy. "Disappearing put you in a bad light. Practically a confession. If I was to tell anybody I know where you are—"

"Nealy," Crispin interrupted, sitting up tensely, "quit beating around the bush. Just exactly what do you want from me?"

"The rubies," replied Nealy simply.

"What rubies?"

"Mott's rubies," Nealy answered, carefully studying Crispin's face. "The rubies that started the fight. The ones you killed him for."

"They weren't Mott's rubies!" Crispin declared hotly. "They were mine. I sweated and slaved for those stones. They're all I have to show for my years in the Mogok fields. Mott had his share. He sold them in Mandalay and blew the money on the races. The rubies are all mine. You know it, Nealy . . ."

"That ain't all I know," Nealy cut in. "I know that Mott was killed in a little bar between Strand Road and the river, down in Rangoon. I know the man who killed him, and I know where he is now . . ."

"You're a damned blackmailer, Nealy!" Crispin was on his feet, deathly pale. He sprang toward the smaller man, his long slender fingers closing on the other's brick-colored throat. "I could choke the life out of you. I could shake you to death, like a cat shakes a rat, but I couldn't shake any decency into you, any sense of justice . . ."

Nealy's ruddy face became scarlet. As Crispin tightened his grip, his beady eyes bulged. His hands clenched. Suddenly he swung one fist to the side of Crispin's jaw. The tall blond loosened his hold and staggered back, dazed. Nealy moved his head slowly from side to side and drew a deep breath.

"Don't be a damned fool, Crispin," he said, rubbing his neck. "You can't go on killing people

indefinitely. Sit down and let's reason this out. You're an ungrateful bastard. Here I am keeping your guilty secrets for you, and what reward do I get? You want to kill me. You call me blackmailer. I've been called all sorts of things! Beachcomber, unprincipled loafer . . . But I live by a code of my own —a Burmese code. I've been nearly twenty years in Burma, and I've picked up some of their principles. A Burmese doesn't kill, for one thing. Neither do I. I respect the right to live, because I want to live myself. And I'm never ungrateful. Even your Sikh flunky there knows how to be grateful. You said so yourself. By the way, you might have him show his gratitude by giving us something to drink."

Crispin indicated the empty glasses. Narab Singh, who had been standing silently in the background during the altercation, stepped forward to pour whisky. There was a clink and a fizz as he pressed in the glass ball that sealed the neck of the soda bottle. He glared at Nealy as he poured the drinks.

"You want reason," said Crispin. "All right. You never earned an honest penny in your life. I've worked hard for those rubies. You come here coolly to take them away from me as hush money. Why don't you quit being a parasite, Nealy? why don't you work for your money?"

"There's no explaining tastes," Nealy replied. "You like to work. I don't. I enjoy living. I like to watch people, to talk to people. I like the color and the movement of the East. I like the clean greenness of Burma. I like the gay, golden-skinned Burmese girls. I like to look at it all through a pleasant alcoholic haze. I love life. So did Mott. You robbed him of it. You owe a debt to society, so to speak. I'm here to collect—by proxy. Let's have the rubies."

He extended his hand across the table, palm upward.

Crispin seized the hairy wrist, twisted it and pulled Nealy toward him.

"I'll be damned if I'll give them to you," he shouted. "Go ahead and blackmail me. They're my rubies. They're—"

With his free hand Nealy pushed the table sharply into the pit of Crispin's stomach. Then he snatched his arm from Crispin's grasp.

"Sorry I can't stay to hear your argument again," said Nealy, "but it bores me." He picked up his topee, then continued: "Anyhow I have to walk to the village to pick up a ride on a bullock cart or something as far as Asansol. I want to get the night train to Calcutta. I've got business there tomorrow. The Bengal Collieries people will be interested to hear about their geologist, Christopher James. They'll be surprised when I tell 'em his name was James Crispin when he mur-

dered a man in Rangoon."

He turned and walked down the steps.

Crispin drew his revolver. His finger was on the trigger. A slight pressure, and this blackmailer would be out of the way. What had he to fear, anyhow? He didn't kill Mott in cold blood. Was he going to kill Nealy in cold blood now? He felt he would be justified. But his hand trembled slightly as he thought of it. It might be an accident. An accident . . .

"Nealy!" he called.

Nealy turned. As he saw the drawn revolver he smiled a crooked smile. He said nothing.

"Come back here!" Crispin commanded.

Nealy walked deliberately back up the path and climbed the four stairs to the verandah.

Crispin's mind toyed with an idea. An accident . . . He had killed Mott by accident. Mott had grapped with him for the possession of a gun. If Nealy would grapple with him, and the gun should be discharged . . . accidentally . . . There would be a witness. Narab Singh was squatting in a corner, watching anxiously.

But Nealy made no effort to seize the gun. He hardly looked at the short steel barrel as he resumed his seat and took off his topee.

"Thanks for calling me," he said, his eyes assuming his cynical smile. "If you'd have shot me in the back, I'd never have forgiven you."

He laughed mirthlessly.

Crispin still held the revolver on his unwelcome guest. It was aimed at that narrow patch of forehead between his black, bushy eyebrows. A little pressure . . . No. It was no use. He didn't have it in him. He had killed a man, but he was not a killer. He could not shoot Nealy in cold blood. With a savage movement, as though angry with himself, he pushed his revolver quickly into the holster.

Nealy leaned back in his chair.

"Well?" he asked. "What did you call me back for?"

Crispin sat down. With a sweep of his arm he sent the two glasses crashing to the floor. He unbuttoned his shirt and felt for his money belt. Taking out a small chamois bag, he threw it toward Nealy. Narab Singh came to sweep up the bits of broken glass.

Neatly emptied the chamois bag on the palm of his hand. A dozen dull-red roughly prismatic crystals lay there. The rays of the setting sun, now striking horizontally across the verandah, awoke the carmine fire beneath the smooth, unpolished facets of the stones, proclaiming them the much-sought pigeon-blood rubies of Upper Burma. They were as big as hazel nuts and the fact that Crispin owned them meant they were fine specimens. They represented a fortune. Nealy smiled as he turned them

over with a stubby finger. Crispin stared at him in sullen anger. Narab Singh was also looking on, but his bearded countenance betrayed no emotion.

"Thanks," said Nealy, pouring the rubies back into the little bag. "That squares your debt."

He looked about him, stood up, took out a pocket knife and walked over to a rolled curtain of split bamboo. He cut a piece of cord from one side, allowing the curtain to fall open fan-wise. With the cord he made a loop from which he suspended the chamois bag, placed the loop over his head and tucked the bag into his shirt.

"You'd better start if you want to get the night train out of Asansol," said Crispin, scarcely opening his lips.

"I've just got word that my business engagement in Calcutta tomorrow has been cancelled," said Nealy lightly. "So I may as well stay the night with you. You seem to have room."

Crispin opened his mouth to protest, but thought better of it. At least he would have the rubies under his own roof for a few hours more.

"All right," he said, and the lifelessness had disappeared from his manner. "The spare room opens on the verandah next to mine, but the nights are still pretty hot. I'll try to get a *chokra* to pull the *punka* over the bed. You won't sleep otherwise."

The sun had set. A ghost of a haze softened the outlines of the straight talipot palms that seemed to march stiffly away from the bungalow across the flat country. A wisp of smoke plumed the little mud village, now scarcely distinguishable from the plain. The mocking howl of jackals came from somewhere behind the house.

"It's an ancient Burmese custom," said Nealy, sniffing at the warm dusty odor which rose into the twilight from the stone floor of the verandah, "that when the the jackals begin to sing, it's time for the short drinks. Haven't you any gin and bitters around here?"

The preliminaries and the meal passed in silence. Nealy ate copiously of Crispin's curry, piling on great quantities of chutneys and Bombay duck. He helped himself to Crispin's liqueurs and selected one of Crispin's best cigars. Then he resumed his regime of whisky and soda.

"I'll be leaving in the morning after breakfast," said Nealy, when he had increased the redness of his face by several shades. "What time do you serve *chota hazri?*"

"Six o'clock."

"Goodnight, then." He started to go, but turned back and scrutinized Crispin's face as though to read his intentions. "By the way," he added. "If you happen to change your mind about those rubies during the night, don't forget that I've told people in Calcutta that I was

coming up here, and they expect me back. If I don't come, they might get inquisitive."

Crispin did not reply. He called for another drink and sat for a moment sipping it. He gazed vacantly at the red turban of Narab Singh, who stood before him, waiting to be dismissed for the night.

"Sahib has sold his rubies?" inquired Narab Singh.

"No."

"Sahib has given them away?"

"No, Narab Singh."

"Perhaps the sahib's friend is to sell them in the bazaar?"

"The other sahib is not a friend," said Crispin.

"He is a thief, then?"

Crispin did not reply.

"Is that all for tonight, Sahib?"

"That's all."

"May the sahib sleep soundly," said Narab Singh. The Sikh did not salaam like other Indian servants. He gave a military salute and disappeared.

Crispin carried the lamp into his room, blew it out, and undressed in the dark. He lay listening to the swish of the *punkah* over his head. The *punkah* was composed of three long strips of matting tacked to wooden cross bars which hung from the ceiling and were made to swing back and forth by a cord running through a hole in the wall and pulled by a Hindu lad sitting outside. It stirred up tepid currents of air which barely penetrated the mosquito netting.

Distant snatches of the ironical cry of the jackals came to Crispin as he lay, sleepless and perspiring, thinking of his rubies. They were in the next room. If he did not act before morning, they would be lost forever. Lost, his years of toil in the East, years of sweating beneath a burning leech of a sun. In vain those malarial years—one long hunger for home and for women of his own kind—years in which he had patiently built up his stake, the stake that was now lost unless . . . unless . . .

Above the drowsy swish of the *punkah* now came another sound: The monotonous, wheedling succession of notes with which the Sikh *durwan* dominated his cobra. Narab Singh was probably entertaining the occupants of the servant lines.

Unless . . . unless Alfred Nealy were to die . . . suddenly . . . before morning. If he could die by some strange oriental disease, a disease that strikes quickly in the night and carries a man off like à chip in a swollen river current. If he could die by accident . . .

Crispin got quietly out of bed and made his way in the dark to the chair on which he had hung his holster. He removed the gun and fingered it. The metal was cool to his touch. The cement floor inlaid with bits of porcelain was cool under his bare feet.

The whining melody of Narab Singh's gourd pipes seemed near-

er. An illusion, no doubt. The breeze was blowing the sound from the servant quarters.

Crispin suddenly laid the gun on the table beside his bed. The feel of the metal was unpleasant to him. He climbed back into bed.

God, it was hard to kill a man outright, even when that man was robbing you of your future. If only he would have fought, used violence in his theft, instead of calmly, maliciously insinuating the stones away . . . If some accident . . . some accident . . . That lazy runt of a railway doctor in Asansol would write the death certificate without difficulty. He would probably refuse to leave his *punkah* and his constant brandy peg for a hot, dusty ride to see an unknown corpse. Like as not he would listen to any verbal explanation and then write the certificate . . . "An accident, doctor. The unfortunate man was visiting me . . ."

That damned wheedling tune of the snake-charmer was getting on his nerves. His mind fitted words to the monotonous repetition of four notes. An accident . . . an accident . . . an accident . . . The tune was louder now, and it wasn't the breeze. The piping came from a corner of the verandah, almost under the two bedroom window. What the hell was the Sikh doing around in front of the bungalow? . . .

An accident . . . An accident, doctor . . . He was cleaning a gun when suddenly he—he . . . .

The piping of the snake-charmer stopped on a wailing note that died away like the deflation of a toy rubber duck that children blow full of air. It didn't begin again. The *punkah* swished back and forth in the darkness.

In the next room Nealy's *punkah* creaked slightly. Crispin strained his ears to listen to it. Nealy's *punkah*. Nealy, who had stolen his future . . . Crispin heard a faint, even rustle, as though something were moving over the smooth crazy-china floor. Nealy's bedsprings gave forth a metallic murmur. A match scratched on the wall.

Then a long, shrill cry filled the night—a high-pitched inhuman scream that was yet human in its terrible hopelessness. It came shrieking from the depths of dread and died in the silence of despair.

Crispin sat up, his heart beating wildly. Instinctively he tore aside the mosquito bar and sprang from bed. Seizing his revolver he rushed into Nealy's room. Two steps inside the door he stopped short. The hair on the back of his neck crawled.

A lamp burning beside the bed illuminated the scene with a yellow glow. Through the transparency of the tent-like mosquito net Crispin saw Nealy, cowering against the head of the bed, his white lips parted in terror, his fear-widened eyes staring in front of him. There, head raised and hood distended, was coiled a cobra.

The deadly serpent's uplifted head stood rigid a foot above the center of the bed. The yellow segments on the under side of the hood glistened as though varnished.

A move on the part of either man and the ugly head would shoot forward with the speed of a high-tension spring. Alfred Nealy would suffer for perhaps an hour, lose consciousness, and all would be over. Alfred Nealy would die of snake bite—by accident. Nealy, the blackmailer, would perish logically and conveniently, leaving the rubies behind him.

But Nealy, the man, would suffer. His agony had already begun. As he crouched in his corner, his face distorted, his right hand clutching a fold in the mosquito bar, he was at once a broken old man and a helpless child. Looking at him, Crispin saw not an enemy but a man in distress. The human being obscured the rubies.

The upraised head of the cobra began to vibrate through a short, nervous arc.

Crispin thrust the muzzle of his revolver against the mosquito netting and pulled the trigger.

There was an explosion. Through a cloud of acrid-smelling smoke Crispin saw a headless serpent writhing on the bed. Nealy watched it, still fascinated. Gradually his features relaxed. His expression of terror became one of stupid surprise. He was speechless.

For a full minute Crispin regarded the tail of the dead cobra lashing about futilely.

"Narab Singh!" he called.

The Sikh appeared almost instantly, too soon for him to have come from the servant lines. He took in the scene with a bewildered glance.

"Sahib?"

"Run to the village and get a tonga," Crispin directed. "This sahib wants to leave for Asansol immediately."

Narab Singh hesitated. There was a bulge under his tunic as though a gourd pipe were concealed there.

"Achchah, Sahib," he said after a short pause.

"I . . . I wonder," said Nealy, his faltering, "if he could pour us a drink before he goes. I . . . I'm just a bit upset."

He crawled off the bed, giving a last glance at the cobra still squirming in death. Regaining his composure, he put his hand into his shirt.

"There's an old Burmese custom," he said, "which is against a man paying the same debt twice. I believe it. It's one of the few things I do believe." Nealy tried to speak with his usual bravado, but his effort lacked conviction. He went on: "You've squared yourself with society twice tonight, Crispin, and its representative, Alfred T. Nealy, never having been called ungrateful although he's been called a lot of other things, has the honor of

refunding your first payment."

He drew the bag from his bosom and placed it in Crispin's hand.

He drank his *chota peg* in silence. When the tonga rattled up to the compound twenty minutes later, he arose without a word. He hesitated a moment as though trying to decide whether or not to shake hands. As Crispin made no overture, he walked down the path and climbed into the waiting vehicle. The light from a smoky lantern hanging from the four-posted superstructure of the tonga shone for a moment on his face, and Crispin noticed that his perpetual cynical smile was gone.

The tonga rolled down the Asansol road to the accompaniment of creaking wheels and the shouts of the Bengali driver.

"Narab Singh!" called Crispin.

The Sikh *durwan* walked slowly to the verandah.

"Sahib?"

"Can you get another cobra in the bazaar, Narab Singh?"

"Perhaps, Sahib."

"How much will it cost?"

"Perhaps fifty rupees, Sahib—for a small one."

Crispin unfolded his wallet and took out a bank note.

"Here's a hundred rupees, Narab Singh," he said. "Get a big one."

NEXT MONTH—

UNTIL HE MET SIMON TEMPLAR—
WHEN THIS TALENTED WOODSMAN CRIED "TIMBER!"
IT'D MEAN A SUCKER WAS FALLING

in

THE TALL TIMBER

A SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

—in *THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE*

the men of the jimmy

by . . . Melville Davisson Post

PARKS," said Randolph Mason, "has Leslie Wilder a country place on the Hudson?"

"Yes, sir," replied the bald little clerk. "It is at Cliphmore, I think, sir."

"Well," said Mason, "here is his message, Parks, asking that I come to him immediately. It seems urgent and probably means a will. Find out what time a train leaves the city and have a carriage."

When Randolph Mason stepped from the train at the little Cliphmore station, it was pitch dark, and the snow was sweeping past in great waves. He groped his way to the little station house and pounded on the door. There was no response. As he turned round a man stepped up on the platform, pulled off his cap, and said, "Excuse me, sir, the carriage is over here, sir." Mason followed the man across the platform, and up what seemed to be a gravel road for perhaps twenty yards. Here they found a closed carriage. The man threw open the door, helped Mason in, and closed it, forcing the handle carefully. Then he climbed up in front,

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Randolph Mason was the first criminal lawyer in detective fiction—the first lawyer to use his talents and his knowledge of the law in the interests of clients who, in those days and today, may be termed "enemies of society." This was the first time there'd been an attempt to tell a story from the standpoint of such a man. But not the last.

FROM: THE STRANGE SCHEMES OF RANDOLPH MASON (1896).
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struck the horses, and drove away.

For perhaps half an hour the carriage rattled along the gravel road, and Mason sat motionless. Suddenly he leaned over, turned the handle of the carriage door, and jerked it sharply. The door did not open. He tucked the robes around him and leaned back in the seat, like a man who had convinced himself of the truth of something that he suspected. Presently the carriage began to wobble and jolt as though upon an unkept country road. The driver pulled up his horses and allowed them to walk. The snow drifted up around him and he seemed to have great difficulty in keeping to the road. Presently he stopped, climbed down from the box and attempted to open the door. He apparently had some difficulty, but finally threw it back and said: "Dis is de place, sir."

Randolph Mason got out and looked around him. "This may be the place," he said to the man, "but this is not Wilder's."

"I said dis here is de place," answered the man, doggedly.

"Beyond a doubt," said Mason, "and since you are such a cunning liar I will go in."

The driver left the horses standing and led the way across what seemed to be an unkept lawn, Mason following. A house loomed up in the dark before them. The driver stopped and rapped on the door. There was no light visible and no indication of any inhabitant. The driver rapped again without getting any response. Then he began to curse, and to kick the door violently.

"Will you be quiet?" said a voice from the inside, and the door opened. The hallway was dark, and the men on the outside could not see the speaker.

"Here is de man, sir," said the driver.

"That is good," replied the voice; "come in."

The two men stepped into the house. The man who had bid them enter closed the door and bolted it. Then he took a lantern from under his coat and led them back through the hall to the rear of the building. The house was dilapidated and old, and had the appearance of having been deserted for many years.

The man with the lantern turned down a side hall, opened a door, and ushered Mason into a big room, where there was a monster log fire blazing. This room was dirty and bare. The windows were carefully covered from the inside, so as to prevent the light from being seen. There was no furniture except a broken table and a few old chairs. At the table sat an old man smoking a pipe. He had on a cap and overcoat, and was studying a newspaper spread out before him. He seemed to be spelling out the words with great difficulty, and did not look up. Randolph Mason took off his greatcoat, threw it over

a chair, and seated himself before the fire. The man with the lantern placed it on the mantelshelf, took up a short pipe, and, seating himself on a box by the hearth corner, began to smoke. He was a powerful man, perhaps forty years old, clean and decently dressed. His forehead was broad. His eyes were unusually big and blue. He seemed to be of considerable intelligence, and his expression, taken all in all, was innocent and kindly.

For a time there was nothing said. The driver went out to look after his horses. The old man at the table labored on at his newspaper, and Randolph Mason sat looking into the fire. Suddenly he turned to the man at his left. "Sir," said he, "to what difficulty am I indebted for this honor?"

"Well," said the man, putting his pipe into his pocket, "the combination is too high for us this time; we can't crack it. We knew about you and sent for you."

"Your plan for getting me here does little credit to your wits," said Mason; "the trick is infantile and trite."

"But it got you here anyhow," replied the man.

"Yes," said Mason, "when the dupe is willing to be one. But suppose I had rather concluded to break with your driver at the station? It is likewise dangerous to drive a man locked in a carriage when he may easily kill you through the window."

"Trow on de light, Barker," said the old man at the table; "what is de use of gropin'?"

"Well," said the younger man, "the fact is simply this: The Boss and Leary and a 'supe' were cracking a safe out in the sticks. They were tunneling up early in the morning, when the 'supe' forced a jimmy through the floor. The bank janitor saw it, and they were all caught and sent up for ten years. We have tried every way to get the boys out, but have been unable to do anything at all, until a few days ago we discovered that one of the guards could be bribed to pass in a kit, and to hit the 'supe' if there should be any shooting, if we could put up enough stuff. He was to be discharged at the end of his month anyway, and he did not care. But he would not move a finger under four thousand dollars. We have been two weeks trying to raise the money, and have now only twelve hundred. The guard has only a week longer, and another opportunity will not occur perhaps in a lifetime. We have tried everything, and cannot raise another hundred, and it is our only chance to save the Boss and Leary."

"Dat is right," put in the old man; "it don't go at all wid us, we is gittin' trowed on it, and dat is sure unless dis gent knows a good ting to push, and dat is what he is here fur, to name de good ting to push. Dat is right, dat's what we's got to have, and we's got to have it now.

We don't keer no hell-room fur de 'supe,' it's de Boss and Leary we wants."

Randolph Mason got up and stood with his back to the fire. The lines of his face grew deep and hard. Presently he thrust out his jaw, and began to walk backward and forward across the room.

"Barker," muttered the old man, looking up for the first time, "de guy has jimmy iron in him."

The blue-eyed man nodded and continued to watch Mason curiously. Suddenly, as he passed the old man at the table, Mason stopped short and put his finger down on the newspaper. The younger man leaped up noiselessly, and looking over Mason's shoulder read the headlines under his finger. "KIDNAPED," it ran. "THE YOUNGEST SON OF CORNELIUS ROCKHAM STOLEN FROM THE MILLIONAIRE'S CARRIAGE. *Large rewards offered. No clue.*"

"Do you know anything about this?" said Mason, shortly.

"Dat's de hell," replied the old man, "we doesn't."

Mason straightened up and swung round on his heel. "Sir," he said to the man Barker, "are you wanted in New York?"

"No," he replied, "I am just over; they don't know me."

"Good," said Mason, "it is as plain as a blueprint. Come over here."

The two crossed to the far corner of the room. There Mason grasped the man by the shoulder and began to talk to him rapidly, but in a voice too low to be heard by the old man at the table. "Smoove guy, dis," muttered the old man. "He may be fly in de nut, but he takes no chances on de large audejence."

For perhaps twenty minutes Randolph Mason talked to the man at the wall. At first the fellow did not seem to understand, but after a time his face lighted up with wonder and eagerness, and his assurance seemed to convince the speaker, for presently they came back together to the fire.

"You," said Mason to the old man, "what is your name?"

"It cuts no ice about de label," replied the old man, pulling at his pipe. "Fur de purposes of dis seeyance I am de Jook of Marlbone."

"Well," said Mason, putting on his coat, "Mr. Barker will tell Your Lordship what you are to do."

The big blue-eyed man went out and presently returned with the carriage driver. "Mr. Mason," he said, "Bill will drive you to the train and you will be in New York by twelve."

"Remember," said Mason, savagely, turning around at the door, "it must be exactly as I have told you, word for word."

"I tell you," said Cornelius Rockham, "it is the most remarkable proposition that I have ever heard."

"It is strange," replied the Police Chief, thoughtfully. "You say the fellow declared that he had a prop-

osition to make in regard to the child, and that he refused to make it save in the presence of witnesses."

"Yes, he actually said that he would not speak with me alone or where he might be misunderstood, but that he would come here tonight at ten and state the matter to me and such reliable witnesses as I should see fit to have, not less than three in number; that a considerable sum of money might be required, and that I would do well to have it in readiness; that if I feared robbery or treachery, I should fill the house with policemen, and take any and every precaution that I thought necessary. In fact, he urged that I should have the most reliable men possible for witnesses, and as many as I desired, and that I must avail myself of every police protection in order that I might feel amply and thoroughly secure."

"Well," said the Police Chief, "if the fellow is not straight he is a fool. No living crook would ever make such a proposition."

"So I am convinced," replied Mr. Rockham. "The precautions he suggests certainly prove it. He places himself absolutely in our hands, and knows that if any crooked work should be attempted we have everything ready to thwart it; that there is nothing that he could accomplish, and he would only be placing himself helplessly in the grasp of the police. However, we will not fail to avail ourselves of his suggestion. You will see to it, Chief?"

"Yes," said the officer, rising and putting on his coat. "We will give him no possible chance. It is now five. I will send the men in an hour."

At ten o'clock that night, the palatial residence of Cornelius Rockham was in a state of complete police blockade. All the approaches were carefully guarded. The house itself, from the basement to the very roof, literally swarmed with the trusted spies of the police. The Chief felt indeed that his elaborate precautions were in a vast measure unnecessary. He was not a quick man, but he was careful after a ponderous method, and trusted much to precautionary safeguards.

Cornelius Rockham, the Chief, and two sergeants in citizen's dress, were waiting. Presently the bell rang and a servant ushered a man into the room. He was big and plainly dressed. His hair was brown and his eyes were blue, frank and kindly and his expression was pleasant and innocent, almost infantile.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said, "I believe I am here by appointment with Mr. Rockham."

"Yes," replied Cornelius Rockham, rising, "pray be seated, sir. I have asked these gentlemen to be present, as you suggested."

"Your time is valuable, no doubt," said the man, taking the proffered chair, "and I will con-

sume as little of it as possible. My name is Barker. I am a comparative stranger in this city, and by pure accident am enabled to make the proposition which I am going to make. Your child has been missing now for several days, I believe, without any clue whatever. I do not know who kidnaped it, nor any of the circumstances. It is now half-past ten o'clock. I do not know where it is at this time, and I could not now take you to it. At eleven o'clock tonight, I shall know where it is, and I shall be able to take you to it. But I need money, and I must have five thousand dollars to compensate me for the information."

The man paused for a moment, and passed his hand across his forehead. "Now," he went on, "to be perfectly plain. I will not trust you, and you, of course, will not trust me. In order to insure good faith on both sides, I must ask that you pay me the money here, in the presence of these witnesses, then handcuff me to a police officer, and I will take you to the child at eleven o'clock. You may surround me with all the guards you think proper, and take every precaution to insure your safety and prevent my escape. You will pardon my extreme frankness, but business is business, and we all know that matters of this kind must be arranged beforehand. Men are too indifferent after they get what they want." Barker stopped short, and looked up frankly at the men around him.

Cornelius Rockham did not reply, but his white, haggard face lighted up hopefully. He beckoned to the Police Chief, and the two men went into an adjoining room.

"What do you think?" said Rockham, turning to the officer.

"That man," replied the Chief, "means what he says, or else he is an insane fool, and he certainly bears no indication of the latter. It is evident that he will not open his mouth until he gets the money, for the reason that he is afraid that he will be ignored after the child is recovered. I do not believe there is any risk in paying him now, and doing as he says; because he cannot possibly escape when fastened to a sergeant, and if he proves to be a fake, or tries any crooked work, we will return the money to you and lock him up."

"I am inclined to agree with you," replied Rockham; "the man is eccentric and suspicious, but he certainly will not move until paid, and we have no charge as yet upon which to arrest him. Nor would it avail us anything if we did. There is little if any risk, and much probability of learning something of the boy. I will do it."

He went down to the far end of the hall and took a package of bills from a desk. Then the two men returned to the drawing room.

"Sir," said Rockham to Barker, "I accept your proposition, here is the money, but you must consider yourself utterly in our hands. I am

willing to trust you, but I am going to follow your suggestion."

"A contract is a contract," replied Barker, taking the money and counting it carefully. When he had satisfied himself that the amount was correct he thrust the roll of bills into his outside coat pocket.

"It is now fifteen minutes until eleven," said the Police Chief, stepping up to Barker's chair, "and if you are ready we will go."

"I am ready," said the man, getting up.

The Police Chief took a pair of steel handcuffs from his pocket, locked one part of them carefully on Barker's left wrist and fastened the other to the right wrist of the Sergeant. Then they went out of the house and down the steps to the carriages.

The Police Chief, Barker, and the Sergeant climbed into the first carriage, and Mr. Rockham and the other officer into the second.

"Have your man drive to the Central Park entrance," said Barker to the Chief. The officer called to the driver and the carriages rolled away. At the west entrance to Central Park the men alighted.

"Now, gentlemen," said Barker, "we must walk west to the second corner and wait there until a cab passes from the east. The cab will be close-curtained and will be drawn by a sorrel cob. As it passes you will dart out, seize the horse, and take possession of the cab. You will find the child in the cab, but I must insist, for my own welfare, that you make every appearance of having me under arrest and in close custody."

The five men turned down the street in the direction indicated, Mr. Rockham and one of the officers in the front and the other two following with Barker between them. For a time they walked along in silence. Then the Police Chief took some cigars from his pocket, gave one to the Sergeant, and offering them to Barker said, "Will you smoke, sir?"

"Not a cigar, I thank you," replied the man, "but if you will permit me I will light my pipe."

The two men stopped. Barker took a short pipe and a pouch of tobacco from his pocket, filled the pipe and lighted it; as he was about to return the pouch to his coat pocket, an old applewoman, hobbling past, caught the odor and stopped.

"Fur de love of Hivin, mister," she drawled, "give me a pipe uv yer terbaccy?" Barker laughed, tossed her the pouch, and the three hurried on.

At the corner indicated the men stopped. The Police Chief examined the handcuffs carefully to see that they were all right; then they drew back in the shadow and waited for the cab. Eleven o'clock came and passed and the cab did not appear. Mr. Rockham paced the sidewalk nervously and the policemen gathered close around Barker.

At half-past eleven o'clock Bark-

er straightened up, shrugged his shoulders, and turned to the Police Chief. "It is no use," he said, "they are not here and they never will come now."

"What!" cried the Police Chief savagely. "Do you mean that we are fooled?"

"Yes," said Barker, "all of us. It is no use I tell you, the thing is over."

"It is not over with you, my man," growled the Chief. "Here, Sergeant, get Mr. Rockham his money and let us lock this fellow up."

The Sergeant turned and thrust his hand into Barker's outside coat pocket, then his chin dropped and he turned white. "It is gone!"

"Gone!" shouted Rockham. "Search the rascal!"

The Sergeant began to go carefully over the man. Suddenly he stopped. "Chief," he muttered, "it was in that tobacco pouch."

The Police Chief staggered back and spun round on his heel.

Rockham bounded forward and brough his hand down heavily on Barker's shoulder. "As for you, my fine fellow," he said, bitterly, "we have you all right and we will land you in Sing Sing."

Barker was silent. In the dark the men could not see that he was smiling.

* * *

The courtroom of Judge Walter P. Wright was filled with an interested audience of the greater and unpunished criminals of New York. The application of Barker for a habeas corpus, on the ground that he had committed no crime, had attracted wide attention. It was known that the facts were not disputed, and the proceeding was a matter of wonder.

Some days before, the case had been submitted to the learned Judge. The attorneys for the People had not been anxious enough to be interested, and looked upon the application as a farce. The young man who appeared for Barker announced that he represented one Randolph Mason, a counselor, and was present only for the purpose of asking that Barker be discharged, and for the further purpose of filing the brief of Mason in support of the application. He made no argument whatever, and had simply handed up the brief, which the attorneys for the People had not thought it worth their while to examine.

Barker sat in the dock, grim and confident. The attorneys for the Commonwealth were listless. The audience was silent and attentive. It was a vital matter to them. If Barker had committed no crime, what a rich, untramped field was open. The Judge laid his hand upon the books piled up beside him and looked down at the bar.

"This proceeding," he began, "is upon the application of one Lemuel Barker for a writ of habeas corpus, asking that he be discharged

from custody, upon the ground that he has committed no crime punishable at common law or under the statutes of New York. An agreed state of facts has been submitted, upon which he stands charged by the Commonwealth with having obtained five thousand dollars from one Cornelius Rockham by false pretenses. The facts are, briefly, that on the seventeenth day of December Barker called at the residence of Rockham and said that he desired to make a proposition looking to the recovery of the lost child of said Rockham, but he desired to make it in the presence of witnesses, and would return at ten o'clock that night. Pursuant to his appointment, Barker again presented himself at the residence of said Rockham, and, in the presence of witnesses, declared, in substance, that at that time (then ten o'clock) he knew nothing of the said child, could not produce it, and could give no information in regard to it, but that at eleven o'clock he would know where the child was and would produce it; and that, if the said Rockham would then and there pay him five thousand dollars, he would at eleven o'clock take them to the lost child. The money was paid and the transaction completed.

"At eleven o'clock, Barker took the men to a certain corner in the upper part of this city, and it there developed that the entire matter was a scheme on his part for the purpose of obtaining the said sum of money, which he had in some manner disposed of; and that he in fact knew nothing of the child and never intended to produce it.

"The attorneys for the People considered it idle to discuss what they believed a plain case of obtaining money under false pretenses; and I confess that upon first hearing I was inclined to believe the proceeding a useless imposition upon the judiciary. I have had occasion to change my opinion.

The attorneys present looked at each other with wonder and drew their chairs closer to the table. The audience moved anxiously.

"The prisoner," continued the Judge, "has filed in his behalf the remarkable brief of one Randolph Mason, a counselor. This I have read, first, with curiosity, then interest, then wonder, and, finally, conviction. In it the crime sought to be charged is traced from the days of the West Saxon Wights up to the present, beginning with the most ancient cases and ending with the later decisions of our own Court of Appeals. I have gone over these cases with great care, and find that the vital element of this crime is, and has ever been, the false and fraudulent representation or statement as to an *existing* or *past fact*. Hence, no representation, however false, in regard to a *future* transaction can be a crime. Nor can a false statement, *promissory* in its nature, be the subject of a criminal charge.

"To constitute this crime there must always be a false representation or statement as to a *fact,* and that *fact* must be a *past* or an *existing fact.* These are plain statements of ancient and well-settled law, and laid here in this brief, almost in the exact language of our courts.

"In this case the vital element of crime is wanting. The evidence fails utterly to show false representation as to any *existing fact.* The prisoner, Barker, at the time of the transaction, positively disclaimed any knowledge of the child, or any ability to produce it. What he did represent was that he would know, and that he would perform certain things, in the future. The question of remoteness is irrelevant. It is immaterial whether the future time be removed minutes or years.

"The false representation complained of was wholly in regard to a future transaction, and essentially promissory in its nature, and such a wrong is not, and never has been, held to be the foundation of a criminal charge."

"But, if Your Honor please," said the senior counsel for the People, rising, "is it not clearly evident that the prisoner, Barker, began with a design to defraud; that that design was present and obtained at the time of this transaction; that a representation was made to Rockham for the purpose of convincing him that there then existed a bona fide intention to produce his child; that money was obtained by false statements in regard to this intention then existing, when in fact such intention did not exist and never existed, and statements made to induce Rockham to believe that it did exist were all utterly false, fraudulent and delusive? Surely this is a crime."

The attorney sat down with the air of one who had propounded an unanswerable proposition. The Judge adjusted his eyeglasses and began to turn the pages of a report. "I read," he said, "from the syllabus of the case of The People of New York versus John H. Blanchard.[1]

> "An indictment for false pretences may not be founded upon an assertion of an existing intention, although it did not in fact exist. There must be a false representation as to an existing fact.

"Your statement, sir, in regard to intention, in this case is true, but it is no element of crime."

"But, sir," interposed the counsel for the People, now fully awake to the fact that Barker was slipping from his grasp, "I ask to hold this man for conspiracy and as a violator of the Statute of Cheats."

"Sir," said the Judge, with some show of impatience, "I call your attention to Scott's case [2] and the leading case of Ranney. In the former, the learned Court announces that if the false and fraudulent represen-

[1] See 90 N.Y. Repts., 314.
[2] See 66 Barb. [N.Y.], 62; 22 N.Y.R., 413.

tations are not criminal there can be no conspiracy; and, in the latter, the Court says plainly that false pretenses in former statutes, and gross fraud or cheat in the more recent acts, mean essentially the same thing.

"You must further well know that this man could not be indicted at common law for cheat, because no false token was used, and because in respect to the instrumentality by which it was accomplished it had no special reference to the public interest.

"This case is most remarkable in that it bears all the marks of a gross and detestable fraud, and in morals is a vicious and grievous wrong, but under our law it is no crime and the offender cannot be punished."

"I understand Your Honor to hold," said the baffled attorney, jumping to his feet, "that this man is guilty of no crime; that the dastardly act which he confesses to have done constitutes no crime, and that he is to go out of this court-room freed from every description of liability or responsibility to any criminal tribunal; that the law is so defective and its arm so short that it cannot pluck forth the offender and punish him when by every instinct of morality he is a criminal. If this be true, what a limitless field is open to the knave, and what a snug harbor for him is the great Commonwealth of New York!"

"I can pardon your abruptness," said the Judge, looking down upon the angry and excited counselor, "for the reason that your words are almost exactly the lament of presiding Justice Mullin in the case of Scott. But, sir, this is not a matter of sentiment; it is not a matter of morality; it is not even a matter of right. It is purely and simply a matter of law, and there is no law."

The Judge unconsciously arose and stood upright beside the bench. The audience of criminals bent forward in their seats.

"I feel," he continued, "for the first time the utter inability of the law to cope with the gigantic cunning of Evil. I appreciate the utter villainy that pervaded this entire transaction. I am convinced that it was planned with painstaking care by some mastermind moved by satanic impulse. I now know that there is abroad in this city a malicious intelligence of almost infinite genius, against which the machinery of the law is inoperative. Against every sentiment of common right, of common justice, I am compelled to decide that Lemuel Barker is guilty of no crime and stands acquitted."

It was high noon. The audience of criminals passed out from the temple of so-called Justice, and with them went Lemuel Barker, unwhipped and brazen; now with ample means by which to wrest his fellows in villainy from the right-

eous wrath of the Commonwealth. They were all enemies of this same Commonwealth, bitter, never-wearying enemies, and today they had learned much. How short-armed the Law was! Wondrous marvel that they had not known it sooner! To be sure they must plan so cunningly that only the Judge should pass upon them. He was a mere legal machine. He was only the hand applying the rigid rule of the law. The danger was with the jury; there lay the peril to be avoided. The jury! How they hated it and feared it! And of right, for none knew better than they that whenever, and wherever, and however men stop to probe for it, they always find, far down in the human heart, a great love of common right and fair dealing that is as deep-seated and abiding as the very springs of life.

THE RUSTLERS RIDE AGAIN

Cattle rustlers are still riding the Texas range. In fact there have been more cattle thefts in recent years than in the frontier days, and more cattle were stolen in 1959 than in any other year in Texas history!

Who takes the place of the lawmen of the frontier days?

The thirty-one inspectors, or detectives, employed by the 800 member strong Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, an organization founded back in the Eighteen Eighties. Each of these inspectors is in charge of so and so many counties. One man, for instance, whose job is to chase rustlers from sixteen West Texas counties, has disposed of fifty-four cattle theft cases in the three years he has been in charge of the district, and is on the trail of many more rustlers.

An interesting sidelight is this man's statement that in all these years he has still to come across a rustler who has stolen cattle because he has to do so. . . Ninety percent of the rustlers he'd arrested had been drinking when they stole the cattle, he reported.

Still others, while they did steal cattle in order to eventually eat them, this wasn't because they couldn't afford to buy food. Far from it! In a typical case, the inspector, on the trail of a rustled 900 pound steer discovered some bones in the garbage can outside a suspect's house. There was a block and tackle in the yard, and some hair on the ground. A laboratory report showed the hair matched some found in the pasture where the steer had been stolen. He made an arrest and discovered that three men had divided the meat, each storing his share in a deep freeze.

Rustlers were changing brands in Texas a hundred years ago—and they're still doing it! In a recent case, cattle were recovered which had been stolen as long as five years ago. It was still possible to detect how the brands had been changed. One brand had been altered four different ways and the cattle then sold at different auctions all over Texas.

three men in search of a miracle

by . . . William P. Brothers

A MIRACLE for Christmas? Well, decide for yourself. Let us set down the events in an orderly manner.

It is December twenty-third. Carols come from every street corner. The snow, falling all afternoon, was deep on the terraces and the streets of the city. The tall buildings with their galaxy of twinkling windows stretched up and disappeared into the gently falling white dots. J. Edward Pierce, tall, distinguished, near sixty, carrying a cane, stomped the snow from his feet as he entered the church of St. Ignatius with the other worshippers. He wore a dark coat and a Homburg hat, which he removed as he entered. Looking closer, one noted that his white shirt might have been cleaner, that it was beginning to fray at cuffs and neck, that tiny red veins, brought on not by the cold, stood out on his cheeks and acquiline nose. Under one arm he carried a paper bag with an oblong, rectangular object inside.

He was thinking, not of the services, not of the cold and snow of Christmas in New York, but of waving palms and white sandy beaches of Florida. In the southland, horses would be running, and

Christmas means so many things to so many people. There is the warmth of the family gathering, sharing with each other—at least for those moments—the joys and the memories which spell Christmas to most . . . But there are others, lonely, hungry and bitter, for whom the ringing bells and the laughter and the festivities seem a mockery.

J. Edward Pierce confessed a weakness for horses.

The object of his visit caught his eye. The Ravenna Madonna. Encrusted with jewels, small, not two hands high, she stood silent and glittering in the candlelight of the altar. He knew her history almost as well as he did his own: carved during an exile in Ravenna by Verrocchio for Lorenzo de Medici in 1462; lent to St. Ignatius church yearly at Christmas time by Mrs. Stanley Pierrepont, its rich and aging owner. This was the third time he'd observed it here, standing alone, guarded only by a velvet rope and tall flickering candles. As an object of art it was priceless. The jewels—diamonds, emeralds, rubies (added by Lorenzo after Verrocchio's exile)—alone were worth perhaps forty thousand—well, twenty thousand after they'd passed through the agile hands of Sam Magee.

He was brought back to the present. Among the crowd he observed a beefy, good-natured gentleman of Irish extraction take a wallet from inside his coat. He extracted a bill and in a spirit of Christmas charity, dropped it into the poor box. Before he folded the wallet and put it back, J. Edward Pierce glimpsed a flash of its contents.

He sighed. It wasn't what he'd come for, but he conscientiously felt the opportunity was not to be passed by. Miami, to be sure, was an expensive town.

Casually he followed the man down the church aisle. Somewhere an organ was playing. The man selected a seat near the aisle. Before he could seat himself, J. Edward Pierce smiled ingratiatingly to get by. The Irishman obligingly remained standing. Fumbling with his Homburg and the paper bag and the cane, J. Edward Pierce stumbled awkwardly against him. Murmuring an apology, he took a seat at the end of the row where he could see the Ravenna Madonna.

The services started but J. Edward Pierce did not hear them. This was the church of his childhood but long ago he'd lost his faith. With expert fingers inside his own coat, he extracted the currency from the Irishman's wallet. When attention was fastened on the altar, he dropped the wallet quietly to the floor, kicked it with his foot until it went sliding under the pews several seats forward.

He felt like a good Samaritan: he would not deprive the man of driver's license, credit cards and other trivia that would take time and effort to replace.

The currency in his pocket felt comfortably thick. An expert in such matters, he judged it to be in the neighborhood of two hundred dollars. Still with his hand in his pocket, he transferred the money to an envelope containing other currency. This had a purpose. In event of imminent apprehension by a pry-

ing policeman, it was necessary to ditch the cash. This had happened twice before. His experienced eye had spotted the officers before they had spotted him. Once the money had gone down a garbage chute and once under the cushions of a hotel lobby sofa. The ten or fifteen dollars they'd found on him had not been enough to arouse their suspicions.

It was absolutely essential that he not be caught *in flagrante delicto.* For J. Edward Pierce was a three-time loser. A fourth would put him inside for keeps. He hated prisons and their gray stone walls; privately he looked forward to spending his declining years in sunshine and open air.

This feeling had grown so strong of late that he had even considered abandoning his profession and taking a job. He'd been offered something doing pari-mutuel work at a track out in southern California. But the long hours, the tedious routine—

He turned his attention back to the Ravenna Madonna. The heist had a comfortable pattern of simplicity. He had studied the habits of the old priest, even knew his name: Father Sullivan. After the service, there was a period when the church was empty, the altar unattended. The parcel under his arm contained an empty carton in which a bottle of liquor is sold at Christmas time. The Madonna, he calculated, would fit nicely inside. What could be more unobtrusive? And as an added precaution, the church had a side door leading to a small garden.

Patiently he waited for the services to end.

Father Sullivan stood at the sacristy window in his vestments, watching the snow as it floated down in the dusk of early evening. Below him traffic waited for the light on the corner to change. Another Christmas season, he thought heavily. What did it mean to most people but the giving and receiving of gifts, the license to eat and drink to excess; the office party, the few days of vacation. It seemed to him that something had gone from the hearts of men.

"Am I becoming cynical?" he asked himself sadly. There was a time when Christmas was the best of all seasons. It was a time of hope, a promise for the future. What has become of peace on earth, good will toward men? Has it been lost in the mechanical carols blaring forth from the loudspeakers, in the rush and push of the last minute shopper? He suspected that it had.

"Oh, there you are, Father Sullivan." He turned around. It was Father Malgoire. He was dressed for the street, a pleasant look of anticipation on his broad young face. "I think I left my muffler in here," he said. He looked about, found it hanging from a peg behind the door.

"You're going out?"

"I thought I mentioned it."

"Oh, yes, so you did."

Father Malgoire said, "Mamma Carlotti is having her whole tribe in. Aunts, cousins, uncles, grandchildren. I am to lend the proceedings dignity."

"And have yourself a good time, no doubt."

"Well, I like large families," Father Malgoire said with a grin. "That's one of the advantages of working in a poor parish. But if you'd like me to stay and give you a hand—"

"No, no."

"Father Bennett won't be much help with that cold, snuffling into a box of tissues, his feet in a basin of hot water."

"I'll manage alone this evening. By the way, did you deliver that parcel to Mrs Pierrepont this afternoon?"

"That I did. And I took the liberty of thanking her for the loan of her Ravenna Madonna. It adds a touch, don't you think."

"Father Kramer has been after her for five years to lend it to St. Anthony's."

"Well, we're lucky to have at least one rich family in the parish."

"You're becoming worldly," Father Sullivan said dryly.

Father Malgoire laughed. "It must be worth a fortune. It's small —but magnificent."

"Yes, that's the word: magnificent." He turned back to the window and the falling snow outside. "I sometimes think a work of art is really a small miracle. The only miracles left us these days. And that was carved some five hundred years ago."

Father Malgoire wrapped the muffler about his neck. "I'm off. You have your Ravenna Madonna for Christmas and I have Mamma Carlotti's family. Both miracles, when you stop to think of it."

Father Sullivan heard the door slam and the feet go pounding down the stairs. He felt suddenly tired. Why haven't I the ready enthusiasm of Father Malgoire or the quiet faith of Father Bennett, he wondered. Perhaps I am getting old. Another Christmas season. The only thing that seemed to sustain him was the knowledge that there were still such things of beauty as the Ravenna Madonna.

There was a knock on the door and it immediately opened. "Are you ready to begin, Father?"

"Yes, I suppose so," he said with a heavy nod.

"It's not important, Larry. Really, it's not."

He stood facing her, a tall young man with broad shoulders, his dark eyes clouded, jaw set in a tight hard line. "Of course it's not important," he mimicked her. "It's just that I can't afford to get you a Christmas present. I haven't got any money, Betty. And my rent is due."

"Larry, I get too many presents the way it is," she said. They stood near the subway entrance, the snow falling silently around them. She was of medium height with even white teeth, a good mouth and sparkling blue eyes that now were somber.

"What business have I falling in love with a girl who's wealthy?"

"*I'm* not wealthy. Father is successful, but then you will be, too."

Looking at her, his anger evaporated into dejection. He'd never been able to stay angry when she was around. Standing before him, her expensive coat not able to hide the trim loveliness of her figure, he felt hopelessly inadequate. "What kind of a man am I? I can't even get the girl I love a Christmas present."

"Don't, Larry—" She moved forward and put a finger to his lips.

"Betty, I damn well ought to go get a job."

"But you've only got six more months, Larry. Then it'll be Larry Ashton, Ph.D., nuclear physicist. You couldn't have gotten the grades you've got, done so much of your dissertation if you'd been working part time. It's worth the sacrifice and effort. Really, it is."

"Is it?" he answered bitterly. "I want to marry you *now*, not wait till June. Now. I want to be able to give a Christmas present, not in six months but now."

"Larry, we could get along somehow—"

"On your father's money? No!" His answer was vehement. "We've been over that before. What do you think I am, anyway?"

"I know I'm in love with you, Larry."

He shook his head like a wounded, bewildered animal with no place to turn. "I'd better be getting back," he said finally. "That damn dining room where I'm generously given my meals will can me if I'm late once more."

"You have bus fare?"

"Oh, I've got that much. But I'd just as soon walk. I need the exercise." He turned to go.

"Aren't you going to kiss me, Larry?" she asked in a tiny voice.

"What right—" he started and suddenly they were in each other's arms, two bundled figures in the early dusk and the falling snow. An occasional passer turned to look at them. They clung to each other as if in desperation, the snow dusting his broad shoulders, making little tear drops on her soft upturned cheeks and long lashes.

"Betty, I love you so much it makes me ache," he whispered huskily. "Every time I hold you I feel like my bones are turning to jelly."

"Larry, Larry," she whispered. "Don't be discouraged and bitter. When you think of those six months, remember that I love you. Tell yourself over and over again that I love you."

He watched her disappear down

the subway steps. Then he started back to his room. Along the long snowy blocks he kept telling himself over and over that he could make it, that six months wasn't so long. But he didn't really believe it; six months was an interminable time. He silently cursed the world that inflicted on him this poverty that prevented him even from getting Betty a present.

What a Christmas this was! Peace on earth, good will toward men. What a laugh. He was suddenly rebellious. To hell with his dining room job. Tonight they could serve themselves. If they fired him, so what. He'd burn his half finished dissertation and get a job as a truck driver. Only a miracle could get him through the next six months anyway.

He was tired of walking, tired of everything. He was in front of a church. A snow covered garden was on one side, separated from the sidewalk by a high iron fence. There was a bench at the far end. Brushing by a burly man waiting at the gate, he went into the garden.

J. Edward Pierce let himself out by the side door. He stood for a moment on the steps as the door swung closed behind him, feeling the cold air on his face, noting that the snow had gotten perceptibly deeper in the past half hour. The snatch, he reflected wryly, had been absurdly simple: the old priest had left the altar, the church had emptied, it had taken only an instant to slip the small Madonna from its pedestal. His sojourn with the horses in Florida was, in a manner of speaking, in the bag.

He started down the path, then stopped abruptly. His blood turned to ice. There was no mistaking the burly plainclothed figure waiting under the light at the front gate: O'Flaherty of the pickpocket detail!

His mind raced. How did the man happen to be there? He looked about him. There was only one exit from the garden and O'Flaherty guarded that. Scaling the high fence was impossible. He retreated back up the steps: he'd replace the Madonna, wait for another day. But when he tried the door he realized it opened only from the inside.

J. Edward Pierce felt panic: the cold walls of prison were slowly closing around him—for good this time. There would be no Florida, no sleek racehorses, no warm sunshine.

He clutched at straws. It had been a long time since he'd prayed: as a child on the cold stone of a church in Boston's slums. Perhaps some of the services he'd just witnessed had reached into his subconscious. "Oh God," he implored anxiously, "deliver me from the hands of mine enemies. Remember there was a thief at Calvary. Get me out of this one and I swear I'll go straight." The prayer came straight from his heart.

But O'Flaherty did not move; God had turned a deaf ear.

Then he had a sudden inspiration. He could see O'Flaherty but in the darkness O'Flaherty could not see him. He moved down the steps again. Beside one of the benches, he scraped the snow aside, put down the parcel containing the Madonna and heaped snow back over it. Tomorrow he would come back. He straightened, dusted the snow from his hands. A new confidence filled him. A plague on O'Flaherty and his ilk.

Boldly he walked down the path to the gate.

O'Flaherty looked up, saw him coming, a slow sad grin spreading across his beefy face.

And at the same moment O'Flaherty saw him, J. Edward Pierce remembered the money in the envelope in his pocket. Again he nearly panicked. Why, why, why hadn't he remembered to stuff it in the bag with the Madonna? With O'Flaherty watching, he couldn't even drop it in the snow.

Every pace toward the gate took him closer to prison. A miracle, he pleaded.

And then a young man entered the garden, walking slowly, dejected, coming between him and O'Flaherty. J. Edward Pierce saw his deliverance. Thank heaven, he thought, he's not the type that walks around with his hands stuffed in his pockets.

The path was narrow, covered with snow. It was natural they should brush one another. With consummate skill, the money went into the young man's overcoat pocket. In the dim light, even O'Flaherty had not seen the maneuver.

"Well, well, Eddie," O'Flaherty greeted him, "I see you've taken up religion."

J. Edward Pierce straightened. "Can I believe my eyes. Officer O'Flaherty. This is a pleasure. Yon church was the faith of my fathers."

"You make a decent haul in there?"

"I beg your pardon."

O'Flaherty stood back and crossed his arms. "Now I'm passing by not half an hour ago and I see my good friend Eddie Pierce going into a church. I ask myself: has the spirit of Christmas touched his noble heart—?"

"I am a deeply religious man, O'Flaherty."

"—or are his light fingers wandering into other people's pockets?"

"Your speech has taken an insidious turn, Sir."

"Sure, sure. But I thought I'd wait till you came out, just to make sure. I'd have pinched you inside but it didn't seem right."

"Your accusations are villainous. They are directed against a man innocent."

O'Flaherty became serious. "Eddie, you're a louse. You'd steal in

church, you'd rob the poor box. There ain't nothin' good about you and I'm going to see you get sent up. Come on, let's take a stroll to the station."

J. Edward Pierce threw back his head. "I entered the house of God for worship religious," he said with dignity. "I resent your threats of durance vile. I'm clean, O'Flaherty. Clean."

"Come on, Eddie."

"Very well, Officer O'Flaherty." He gave the cane a flourish. It was just as well to get away from here before that bumbling youth discovered the loot in his pocket. "But I warn you," he said, "you'll make yourself the laughing stock of the precinct house."

Larry Ashton was not conscious of being jostled as he entered the park. And as J. Edward Pierce had observed, he was not the type that walked about with hands stuffed in his pockets. Rather, Larry Ashton was a kicker of stones in the path, a poker of objects with his toe.

Sitting there in the dim light with the snow falling around him, he noticed the mound in the snow. He stared at it for ten minutes, his mind preoccupied. What right had he to tell a girl like Betty he loved her when he had less than a dollar in his pocket? He had no friends he could borrow from; they were as broke as he. He had nothing worth pawning, except perhaps his overcoat. Maybe he could do without it. He considered it for a moment. His toe reached out and pushed the mound in the snow, encountered something solid. He withdrew his foot. Was a degree worth what he was going through?

He stared at the mound. Again he poked it with his toe. He realized he was getting cold. He ought to go home. He got up, his bones aching and stiff. Perhaps he should pawn his overcoat. He nudged the mound with his foot, saw it was a paper bag.

Curious, he picked it up. Taking the carton out of the bag, he saw in the dim light the label: a good grade of bourbon whiskey. He frowned. Someone had evidently come here to sit, had put it down and forgotten it. Quite awhile ago, considering the snow that was over it. It would be absurd to leave it. He suddenly smiled.

Hardly an appropriate gift, but it was something. At least he and Betty could have a drink or two to celebrate Christmas. He felt suddenly elated at his good fortune. It was oddly heavy, he noted, as he put the carton back in the paper bag. Well, well. Tucking it under his arm he started off with a light step the several remaining blocks to his rooming house.

Removing his vestments, Father Sullivan thought about the Ravenna Madonna. He thought of going down and looking at it again, but decided he would let that pleasure

wait until he made his customary final rounds of the evening. In the meantime, there was that letter about repairs to the church waiting to be written to the Archdiocese.

Wearily he climbed the steps to his study. It was cold. Something was wrong with the rectory furnace again. He made a mental note to speak to Joseph about it tomorrow. Seated at his desk, he tried to compose the letter he wanted to write. But the words would not come; his mind kept drifting off.

Perhaps the letter he should write would be to the Archbishop himself. "I am too old for parish work," he mentally composed. "In forty years I have lost the capacity to find the redeeming virtue in men. In these days the spirit of Christmas is an empty mockery, the spiritual value has gone from it completely."

He put down his pen. It was no use. Perhaps if he went down, looked at the Madonna for a bit, his spirits would lift. In the past its artistic perfection had never failed to ease his mind.

At first, in the vast dimness of the church, the altar candles flickering steadily, he could not believe the Madonna was gone. For a full minute he stared at the pedestal where it had stood, expecting momentarily that it would appear before his eyes, that his mind was playing him a mischievous trick.

With a mounting dread he searched the altar. Father Bennett was in his room with a cold, Father Malgoire was out. They would not have touched it in any case. One of the altar boys? No. Someone from outside. He hurried down the aisle to the front door. Outside, the snow already covered the footprints of those from the last service. The two lamps flanking the large iron gates cast their dim glow on a deserted street.

There was a vast emptiness in him as he made his way back to his study. As a stolen work of art, it would have no value; but the jewels could be disguised and sold. For this reason he knew he would never see the Madonna again. What possible explanation could he give to Mrs. Pierrepont? I am a poor, stupid old fool, he thought, to have been so careless, so trusting of human kind.

In his study he sat down heavily. He found the number of the nearest precinct house. He picked up the telephone and dialed. When he had finished, he looked down at his hands: they were trembling and he realized that tears were streaming down his cheeks.

He knew he was weeping, not for the loss of the Madonna, but for the evil in the hearts of men everywhere.

Larry Ashton read about the theft of the Ravenna Madonna in the papers the following day. Coming the day before Christmas, the story had a human interest value the newspapers were quick to ex-

ploit. Mrs. Pierrepont, in a trembling voice, had related the statue's history, had described it as priceless.

So while the police began their systematic combing of the shadier art and gem dealers, a carton labeled "Bourbon Whiskey" stood like a sentinel on the dresser in Larry Ashton's cheap room.

Somehow, finding a bottle of whiskey had given a lift to his spirits. At least he could provide a Christmas celebration. In a way it was fitting: he imagined a yule log flaming in his long disused fireplace, the flowing cup being passed. An old time Christmas. He tapped his foot and thought. What to do about a yule log?

At noon he called Betty from the telephone in the downstairs hall. "A party," he told her. "At my place. Can you come at nine?"

She sensed the change in his attitude. "What's happened, Larry?" she wanted to know. "You sound excited."

"I've got a fairy godmother. Come down and see."

When she arrived that evening, a tiny Christmas tree stood between two candles on the dresser and a fire blazed in the fireplace. He took her coat and she stood in the center of the room, her cheeks aglow, the fire giving her hair the color of champagne. Larry felt lucky and proud and happy as he looked at her.

"The fire is wonderful," she beamed. "And you've even got a Christmas tree."

"The little man on the corner who sold them realized this afternoon the market was dead. He gave me one. I cut off the top for the tree. The rest is my yuletide fire."

"Larry, it's beautiful."

"And you're beautiful, too. This," he held up the carton, "is to celebrate Christmas and the fact that I'm a very lucky man."

"You shouldn't have spent your money like that."

"I didn't spend any money. Believe it or not, I found it."

"Found it?"

"Sure. Open it and let's drink to a Merry Christmas."

He turned to get the mugs for a toddy and heard her startled exclamation behind him. When he looked around, she was holding a statue half out of the opened liquor carton.

"Larry! It's not whiskey at all. What—?"

He took the Madonna from her, an incredulous look on his face. In the light from the fire and the candles, the jewels sparkled like thousands of tiny stars. For a long moment they stared at each other wordlessly.

"It's the—"

"The stolen Madonna," she whispered. "Where did you find it, Larry?"

"In a churchyard. It was in that box. I thought it was whiskey. I

didn't open it. It was covered with snow."

"Larry, it's exquisite. The Ravenna Madonna, the papers called it. We must take it to the police."

"The thief must have got scared and dropped it. Or hid it in the snow. Maybe planning to come back—"

"Larry, do you remember the church? It's Christmas Eve. They'll be so glad to get it back."

"Sure, I remember the church. Only a few blocks from here. St. Ignatius, I think they call it. But they're liable to think I stole it."

"They couldn't think—"

"Oh, yes they could. And would. Penniless student, desperate— Even if there were no charges, the police would hold me for questioning a couple of days. Christmas in jail doesn't sound appealing. Maybe we could send it back by mail."

"But it's Christmas Eve! They'll want it tonight of all nights. Why don't we take it back and leave it?"

"I suppose we could. They'd certainly find it."

"No one would suspect us. There wouldn't be any danger."

He looked at it for a moment, glittering in the soft light. "What a piece of workmanship. You know, Betty, the papers said it was carved while the artist was in exile, alone, sick, poor, without any friends at all. The gems were added later. It makes you think—" He paused.

"What is it you're trying to say, Larry?"

"It takes a great man, a great spirit to create something in poverty and misery. It makes me think my own attitude might be just a tiny bit petty. I'm broke but it doesn't mean I have to spend my time whining. I can't get you anything for Christmas, but it's no reason to wallow in self-pity."

She took his hand. "I'm glad you feel like that, Larry."

They both stood looking at the Madonna. "It's almost like the Madonna herself has given me a Christmas gift, a lesson in understanding. What do I need money for? I've got your love. Fortune is a state of mind. In fact, I'm the richest man in the world. I've got a pocketful of money—"

"Oh, Larry," she whispered, "let's take it back. Now. This very moment. Where's your coat?"

He took his coat from the hook, slipped it on, plunged his hands into the pockets.

"What's this? Where did it—" He took out the envelope, opened it and currency cascaded to the floor.

Amazed, they both stared at it. Then both stooped to pick it up. They rose together, a look of blank astonishment on both their faces.

"Where—?"

Larry shook his head and kept shaking it. "I don't know. I don't know. How long has it been there? A miracle?" He turned to face the Madonna. "How—?" he began.

The small statue stood silent and serene on the dresser.

The church was dim and quiet. Candles burned in preparation for the midnight service. Two women knelt praying. Larry and Betty tiptoed down the aisle and sat near the front.

Betty leaned close and whispered, "There's a little pedestal up there. Could you put it there? They'll be sure to see it."

"It looks safe enough," he whispered back. "Wait till the church is empty."

In a few minutes the two women got up and left. They were alone. With his heart hammering, Larry tiptoed forward. It took him only a moment to slip under the velvet rope, extract the statue from the box and place it on the pedestal.

"I need a cup of coffee," he whispered nervously when he came back. "Here, let's slip out this side door. I think I hear someone coming."

"It's gone, no question about that," J. Edward Pierce said to himself. He poked the snow near the bench with his cane. For some reason he was relieved the package was not there. It had been too near a thing yesterday with O'Flaherty. Of course they'd had to release him when they'd found nothing on him. Looking for the gems, the police had arrested Sam Magee, the fence whom he'd thought safe. Close, indeed. Only that young man entering the garden last night had saved him.

He'd prayed for a miracle and one had happened. Of course, he didn't really believe these things. Was it fear of another—a final—jail term that had kept him awake all last night? Or was it the nagging memory of a promise—?"

He sighed. Well, working in California might not be so bad. It would be warm there, sunshine. He wondered if perhaps—well, when he got used to it—

His thoughts were interrupted. The side door of the church opened. For an instant he thought he detected something familiar in the figure of the young man. Then he saw the two, hand in hand, were obviously in love. He felt an overpowering spirit of good fill his heart. He made his decision. "Joyous Noel," he greeted them with a flourish. "It is the season of hope."

Father Sullivan left the rectory and crossed to the church. He walked slowly. It would be quiet now, and he wanted to check the altar before the midnight Mass. Later, what with getting the special choir settled and ready and all the other things, there would be no time.

The vacancy created by the stolen Madonna was like a sharp pain in his chest. He knew the police would never recover it. The thief, whoever he was, would have realized the special problems of disposing of it, would have planned carefully. The knowledge of such

evil confirmed the great heaviness in him.

But at the church door he stopped. Can I enter here with these thoughts of bitterness, he suddenly asked himself. Have I forgotten the lesson at Christmas is one of forgiveness: that He was sent with redemption for the sins of all mankind.

He leaned against the door, feeling the rapid beat of his heart. I have been presumptuous, he thought. I am appointed not to sit in judgment but to help men find the way to Him. Perhaps some good, unforeseen by man, will come out of the theft. Let him be forgiven, the thief, whoever he is, as I ask forgiveness for myself and for everyone at Christmas.

He opened the door and entered, his heart lighter than it had been for days.

As he mounted the altar, he saw the Madonna, once again back in her place, glittering and serene in the flickering light of the candles.

He stared. He could not believe his eyes. He went up to it, thinking his knees would give way under him. It was a cruel trick of his mind, an illusion that would vanish when he reached out his hand.

But the Madonna was real. Each glittering gem was intact. For a long moment he stood holding it. Finally he placed it back on the pedestal and turned from the altar.

The main aisle of the church stretched out before him. He found himself walking down it, needing a breath of the fresh cold air. As he stood on the steps, he could find no solution. A Christmas miracle?

Two men and a girl came out of the church garden at the side. For a moment he thought all three were together.

"Merry Christmas, Father," the younger man said. In the dim light he thought he detected a twinkle in the younger man's eye.

"Merry Christmas," he replied. And he suddenly knew that the miracle was not in the inexplicable return of the Madonna, not in a haphazard accident of events that he could not understand. The miracle always is the change wrought in the hearts of men.

And they were gone, the young man and the girl turning one way, the older man turning the other. "Merry Christmas," Father Sullivan repeated to the cold night and the empty street. "Merry Christmas."

AN EDITORAL ASIDE

There has been a trend in this field in recent years, a trend insisting that workers in this field—both writers and editors—should stand apart from what is happening about them, intent only on amusing you who are the readers and not sharing with you something of their knowledge and understanding of the world in which we all, after all, live and work. . . . And eventually die. . . .

It so happens that I personally disagree with this insistence that we be, if I may put it this way, omniscient ostriches. To insist on this is, to my mind, to ignore the influence that writer and editor alike can have upon a society that should by now have had its surfeit of conformism.

It is high time that we recognize that this country owes its greatness to its non-conformists—not to its conformists—and that if we are to survive, as a nation, we need inspired thinkers, even heretics, even iconoclasts—men and women who can dream of and plan for a changed Tomorrow without being bound by the chains imposed upon them by a conformist society.

The norm is not necessarily the most desirable—particularly if it ties us down in our search for the New Frontiers! These, admittedly not to be reached over-night, appear to be viewed with undue alarm by some who refuse to admit that the years have brought us new responsibilities as a nation and as a people—responsibilities which could never have been dreamed of when we were young, and which will have been translated into reality before we are much older.

Relax!

There is no intention of turning this magazine into a partisan journal. This, bluntly, does not sell magazines! But I do say to those among you who, as so many of us, have for years searched for these New Frontiers, that these are going to be interesting times, fantastically interesting times, times which in retrospect we will be thankful that we have been allowed to experience. . . .

This was reflected, at least to me, in Ranjee Shahani's vignette of the Europe which Eichmann knew which appeared in last month's issue, and in George Fielding Eliot's article on the murder of King Abdullah which appears this month. By way of balance, there is Lawrence G Blochman's story of Burma—a generation ago, August Derleth's classic Solar Pons pastiche, Melville Davisson Post's story, Edward D Hoch's latest Ben Snow story, and Wenzell Brown's excursion into the day after Tomorrow when the impulse to kill will still be with us—and only the methods used will be different. . . .

With these, two seasonal stories, and a new Saint story by Leslie Charteris all that remains is to say Happy Holidays to all of you!

See you next month!

HANS STEFAN SANTESSON

cloak and dagger

by . . . John Jakes

ROGER GUESSED that the opposite side had got on to his mission when a black Citroen roared into the street and three men armed with Sten guns leaped out and began shooting at him simultaneously.

Bullets lacerated the stones of the cafe wall. Roger's head had been in front of this spot a moment before. As the slugs whined murderously in the twilight air, Roger crawled on hands and knees between the hems of the checked tablecloths.

He heard a great crashing above his own panicky breath. French curses, liquid and rapid, punctuated the bursts of gunfire. Spasmodically the shooting stopped twenty seconds after it had begun.

But by that time Roger had already crawled into the shadows of the cafe, bowled over the mustached proprieter and raced up rickety stairs to the second floor. He went out through a trapdoor to the slate roof.

Clinging dizzily to a chimney-pot, he looked down. A flock of geese which had been strolling through the cobbled main street of the tiny village of St. Vign flew every which way, honking at the Citroen which nearly ran over them as it gathered speed and

Readers who remember the cliché-filled thrillers of the thirties--and some novels, published more recently (you will each think of at least one, I am sure!)--will welcome this spoof of the foreign intrigue story with, one trusts, the proper, reactions . . .

rolled away. Then, with a tight-lipped gasp of relief, Roger located the source of the crash which had saved him—an overturned vintner's cart. He vaguely remembered the cart being unloaded before the shooting started, as he sat sipping Coca-Cola, reading the pamphlet in his pocket, *A New Glossary of Interesting Americanisms,* and trying to look like a tame philologist in horn-rimmed spectacles.

He had failed miserably, he thought. In the disguise, that is. But then, the opposite side always had first-rate intelligence. Lucky the vintner's cart had gotten in the line of fire. The poor vintner was drawing a crowd of people as he sobbed over his dribbling and bullet-riddled casks and cursed off would-be drinkers. The whine of the Citroen had died altogether.

It was chilly, hanging on the chimney-pot in the wind. Below in the street a nun in the crowd pointed up at Roger. Quickly he scrambled down the slates. He leaped to the adjoining roof in the amber dusk.

As he went skulking across the rooftops, one thought came up paramount in his mind after his shock and surprise had passed: his still-urgent need to get aboard *The Silver Mistral* Express which was scheduled to go through St. Vign on its way to Paris in—Roger consulted his shockproof watch while resting on the roof of a laundry—exactly forty-eight minutes.

His first task was to reach the railway station, hoping the assassins would be frightened off making another attempt on him because of the notoriety their first failure caused. Sliding, Roger dropped into an alley and began to run through the grape-fragrant French twilight.

As he ran he heard a number of whistles and saw several gendarmes pedalling frantically on bicycles. Good, he thought, puffing. Wonderful. If they keep the Citroen holed up in some garage for—again the watch—thirty-two minutes, I'll make it.

Reaching the depot without incident, he paced restlessly along the platform, trying to read his pamphlet. At last, up the track, a light shone and an air horn cried out stridently.

When the crack train from the south of France pulled to a hissing halt in response to the ticket seller's signal lantern, Roger leaped aboard with the pamphlet of Americanisms still clutched in one hand. The conductor badgered him in French for disturbing the schedule as the express began to roll. Roger ignored him. He held up the pamphlet in the vestibule light. On the inside front cover a car and compartment number had been noted in ballpoint. Roger turned to the right, stepped through a velvet-padded door, then hastily backed out again. He had gone the wrong way. The private saloon car was filled with

men and women in formal clothes, opera capes and evening gowns.

"What's that?" Roger asked the trainman sourly. "A masked ball?"

"An opera troupe, *Anglais*. Returning from a triumphant engagement in the South," replied the trainman, kissing his fingertips. Then he scowled. "Let me see your ticket, please."

Roger handed it over.

"How far is compartment seven, car eleven-twelve?"

"Four cars to the rear," said the trainman without interest, turning his back on Roger and beginning to whistle an operatic aria. Roger kicked open the door on his left. He hurried, walking as fast as he dared. The cars were dimly lit, most of the doors closed. The wheels of the train clicked eerily from the shadows. Roger shivered. He felt for his automatic under his coat.

Finally he found the right car. Putting his pamphlet in his pocket, Roger knocked at compartment seven.

"Dozier? Open up."

Mouth close to the wood, Roger whispered it again:

"Dozier! For God's sake, man, open—"

With a start Roger realized the sliding door was unlocked.

He stepped quickly into the darkened carriage, blinked, and uttered a sigh of disgust. He might have known.

Wasn't this precisely why he had been sent to board the train in such haste? Because the agent—some agent, Roger thought, staring at the compartment's lone occupant—was one of the worst bunglers in the trade. An IBM machine had slipped a cog or something, dispensing the wrong punch card when the escort was being selected for the vital mission of accompanying Sir Stafford Runes from Cairo to Paris. At the last moment, higher-ups had caught the error and dispatched Roger by 707 to catch the train at St. Vign and see that no fatal damage had been done.

The agent in question, actually a coder from London who doubled in ladies' ready-to-wear, and who had no business at all in the field, was a fat, pot-bellied bald man with the first name Herschel. At the moment he was snoring contentedly with his hands twined over his Harris-tweeded paunch. Roger shook him.

"Dozier, wake up. Do you hear me? What's the matter with you, Dozier?"

Sniffing, Roger realized dismally that brandy had aided Herschel Dozier's slumber. With each valuable minute spent attempting to wake the slumbering cow-like fellow, Sir Stafford Runes sat alone, undoubtedly in the next compartment. Disgusted, Roger slid back into the corridor.

Which compartment, right or left?

He tried the one on the right,

tapping softly. A feminine giggle came back, together with some sounds which indicated that if an archaeologist was inside, he was a young, lively archaeologist, not the red-haired, vain, aging Runes.

Moving back along the carpeted corridor to the other door, Roger hesitated, his knuckles an inch from the panel.

The compartment door stood open perhaps a thirty-second of an inch, allowing a hairline of light to fall across Roger's loafers.

Sweat came cold on his palm. He drew his automatic.

Was someone from the opposite side in there?

Runes, on an underground exploration in the vicinity of Nisapur, had unearthed what headquarters described only as a "vital plan" belonging to the opposite side. The plan, apparently, was so important that higher-ups had ordered Runes to discontinue his valuable role as a double agent at once and return to home base as fast as he could while still avoiding danger. Now Roger smelled danger like burning insulation on a wire.

Drawing a tight breath, he cursed the faulty IBM machine, gripped the door handle, and yanked.

The first thing he saw was the corpse of Sir Stafford Runes.

It sprawled doll-fashion on the seat, an ivory knife-hilt poking from the waistcoat. Against the talcumed whiteness of the dead man's puffy old features, the carrot brightness of his thick red hair looked gruesome.

Then Roger's eyes were torn to the tall man who stood calmly in the center of the compartment, eyeing him with a stainless-steel gaze from under the rim of a shining top hat. From the man's lean shoulders fell the shimmering folds of an opera cape, which showed a flashing hint of blood-red satin lining as he raised one white-gloved hand in a vicious little salute. Roger slammed the door shut as the man said:

"Is it really you, Roger?" His voice was clipped, educated. "I'd thought they took care of you in St. Vign."

"No such luck."

Covering the gaunt man with his automatic, Roger nodded down at the dead body. The express train's horn howled in the night.

"So you did this, you rotten bastard. Just the way you ran over Jerry Pitts with the road-grader in Liberia and fed Mag Busby that lye soup in Soho." A vein in Roger's temple began to hammer. "You rotten bastard," he repeated. "Someone should have squashed you a long time ago. But what are you doing in that get-up, Victor? Travelling with that opera company?"

"Of course, dear boy," the other purred. "I'm representing them on this tour. I schedule performances wherever duty calls. Such as in Paris. Most convenient." A white

glove indicated the speeding motion of the train, but for all the man's casualness there was glacial chill in his calculating eyes. "It appears that this time, however, with you as relief man, I've landed in a spot of trouble. I'd thought all I had to worry about was that fool asleep next door."

"This time, Foxe-Craft," Roger said quietly, "you've got a bullet to worry about."

"A bullet?" The urbane man's eyebrow lifted. "Oh, now, really, old chap, so *brutal?*"

"Did you think about brutality when you fed Mag the lye soup? Listen, mister, for ten years we've wanted you. You and your fancy gloves and your code name." A line of derision twisted Roger's wire-like mouth. *"Elevenfingers.* Proud of that name, aren't you? One up on the rest of us, and all that. Well, tonight, I think I'll take those fingers off. One at a time."

With a stab of satisfaction Roger saw a dollop of sweat break out on Foxe-Craft's upper lip. Roger made a sharp gesture with the automatic.

"All right, Elevenfingers—"

"Don't make it sound cheap," Foxe-Craft said, dangerously soft. "Not theatrical, I warn you."

"Where's the folio Runes was carrying?"

Hastily Roger searched the archaeologist's corpse. He performed the same action on the person of his enemy, a shred of doubt beginning to worry him as he completed the task, unsuccessfully. Apart from the usual innocuous card cases, visas, anti-personnel fountain pen bombs and other personal effects, neither dead researcher nor live agent possessed a single item remotely resembling the flat, eight-and-a-half by eleven series of sheets, blank to the eye but inked invisibly, which Runes was carrying back from Nisapur. Roger raised the automatic again.

"Take a long look down the muzzle, friend. See the message? I can put some bullets in places that'll hurt like hell. And I don't care if I wake the whole damned train doing it. But you're going to tell me where the folio is. You're going to give it to me, or I'll blow you into an assortment of pieces no doctor on the Continent can put together." Desperate, angry, Roger added: "In five seconds."

Foxe-Craft shrugged.

"Very well."

As Foxe-Craft consulted a timetable card riveted to the compartment wall his eyes glinted maliciously for a moment. Then the toe of his dancing pump scraped a worn place in the carpeting. Looking at his wristwatch, the man who liked to call himself Elevenfingers said: "You're an American. Look under the rug."

"I'll just do that."

Carefully Roger knelt, keeping the automatic in a position to fire at the slightest sign of movement in the corner of his eyes. Roger

probed at the frayed edges of the hole in the carpeting. And at that precise instant, the game turned against him; *The Silver Mistral Express* whipped around a curve and into a tunnel.

There was a scream of horn, a sudden roar of wheels racketing off walls. Roger swayed, off balance.

A tasselled pump caught him in the jaw, exploding roman candles behind his eyes a moment after he caught a fragmentary glimpse of traces of ash beneath the carpet.

Foxe-Craft *couldn't* have burned the folio, Roger thought wildly as he fell backward, flailing. I didn't smell anything—and that means *Runes* burned it because he knew they were on to us, but why did he burn the only copy in existence—?

No answer came except the roar of wheels and another brutal smash of a pump instep on his jaw, smacking Roger's head against the side of the compartment, sending him to oblivion.

Through his pain he had dim recollections of the next hour—hands lifting him, a fall through space, a jolt, the *clacka-clacka-clacka* of wheels gathering speed, then the chirruping of night insects. And silence.

Bruised, disappointed, briar-scratched and burr-decorated, Roger woke sometime before dawn, lying in a ditch a few hundred yards south of another railway depot, this one bearing a signboard naming the town as St. Yar.

Roger picked himself up and tried to wipe the humiliation of failure from his mind. In another two hours Foxe-Craft—and the train—would be in Paris, doubtless with the vital material in his hands.

Roger felt, somehow, that it still existed; that Elevenfingers had tricked him. But how? Starting off, Roger noticed his ubiquitous pamphlet in the weeds. He stared at it dully, finally putting it back in his pocket as he passed a sign pointing the way to a French military aerodrome two kilometres away.

Trudging into the village, Roger located an inn and ordered a glass of wine. The proprieter treated him with the respect given by all Frenchmen to those who look like confirmed alcoholics—torn clothes and hangdog expression. Dispiritedly Roger sat at a street-side table as the sun rose. Bells chimed in the cathedral. A French jet lanced the sky overhead.

To kill the futility of it all, Roger bought a paper at a kiosk and sat by a fountain reading. At a town quite a distance south, the wet-inked lead story ran, an unidentified bald man had been found in a ditch by railway inspectors.

Poor Herschel Dozier, Roger thought. It would be just like Elevenfingers to finish the sleeping agent, just for amusement. Another knife in the guts for nothing . . .

When he had finished the paper, he dragged out the pamphlet to try to dull his mind.

"What the hell do *I* care about Interesting Americanisms?" he said, blinking in the sun. And then, as pigeons cooed around his feet and a postcard-seller passed by hawking indecent views, the depth of his blunder made itself known.

Foxe-Craft's remark flashed like a bomb. With a whoop, Roger leaped up and ran to the cafe.

"Where can I get a taxi to the military aerodrome? I have to get a helicopter to Paris right away!"

The baffled proprieter gave him directions. Roger's identification papers, concealed in his heels, served him well. Within an hour he stood on the noisy platform as *The Silver Mistral* Express chugged in along the arrival track.

Roger felt for the automatic in his pocket, grinning tensely. Of *course* Runes had burned the folio. Too obvious. But if Roger was right, there was another copy—*had* to be!

Down the platform trouped the formally-dressed opera company, Foxe-Craft in their midst. When he saw Roger he turned and tried to walk in the opposite direction. Roger raced after him. He gouged the automatic in the agent's ribs.

"*Really,* old fellow—" Foxe-Craft began.

"Shut up," Roger said. "You egotistical bastard. Think you're so damn clever. One up. Well, you shouldn't have opened your precise mouth, Elevenfingers, because now you're going to be tagged with a killing. I thought it was Dozier in the ditch. But it wasn't. It was Runes. Bald, vain Runes."

Roger dug into the writhing agent's pocket, came up with his prize, carrot-red.

"First we'll go wake up Dozier. Probably he's still asleep."

Roger turned his find over, noted minute markings which looked like ink on the inner, rather burlap-like surface.

"Then," Roger added, gagging his captive, "we'll have the lab blow up the stuff that's written here. Inside old Sir Stafford's—"

A crowd began to gather. The divas and tenors of Elevenfinger's now-defunct opera troup clucked curiously. Roger held up the carrot-colored wig and finished:

"—inside, or under—as we Americans say—his rug."

ART STORED IN MARSEILLES BANK

Alarmed by the recent wave of art thefts on the Riviera, one noted resident of the Cote d'Or was reported to have sent his collection of impressionist and modern paintings to a Marseilles bank for safekeeping while he visited London. The paintings, normally stored in a special strongroom at his villa, were called "more an anxiety than a pleasure" as he agreed to the suggestion of the local police to send the paintings to the bank.

frontier street

by . . . Edward D. Hoch

A TINKLING piano—there was always a tinkling piano off somewhere in the corner—mingled with the clink of glasses and the murmur of voices as the man called Ben Snow pushed his way through the swinging doors of the Golden Swan. . . .

"Is Len around?" he asked the tired bartender. "Tell him Ben Snow is here."

The man nodded and moved down the bar, still polishing the beer mug he held in one hand. Over the bar Ben saw the ten-foot-wide painting that gave the place its name—a painting of a single golden swan surrounded by unclad bathing girls in a variety of poses. Len, they said, had brought the thing West himself, on trains as far as they went and then the rest of the way by stage and wagon. It wasn't much as art, but cowhands and ranchers often came from miles around just to see it.

Now, with the tobacco smoke hanging in layers, there was nothing much else to look at in the Golden Swan. The piano player looked bored, pounding out some old song Ben hadn't heard since the days back in New Mexico. Business wasn't too good this night at

Edward D. Hoch returns with another story about the man who looked so much like "that man" who perhaps hadn't died after all . . . That other man must also have walked a lonely road, as Ben Snow finds he must, pursued by shadows . . .

the Golden Swan—only a few customers who looked standard, only a few drifters like you found in any bar west of Texas.

"Come in, Mr. Snow. I'm happy you could come!"

Ben focused his narrow eyes on the short, smiling man in the doorway at the rear. Len Antioch—the power on Frontier Street, the boss of the Golden Swan, with his brother a force to be reckoned with in Arizona. Short and smiling, but somehow very deadly.

Ben had never really spoken to the man during his two months on Frontier Street. That was why the summons this morning had been so strangely unexpected. Now he simply shrugged and followed the man into the rear office, not knowing just what to expect.

Inside, beyond the door marked *Private,* Ben Snow settled down into one of the few comfortable chairs in town, opposite the battered desk that served as Len Antioch's home base. "Well?" he asked quietly.

"Drink, Mr. Snow?"

"Too early in the day."

Len Antioch grunted. "Then I'll get right to the point. I know who you are, Snow. I've known for the past several weeks."

"Who I am?" Ben repeated, pretending to be puzzled.

"Let's not fool around," Len said, the smile fading quickly from his face. "I want a job done. The new deputy sheriff . . ."

"Killed? You want him killed?"

Len Antioch's smile returned. "I see we speak the same language, Billy."

"The name is Ben, remember? Ben Snow."

"Sure, Ben. A thousand dollars for the deputy's body before sundown."

"A thousand . . ."

"It's a lot of money, Ben. It would be a lot of money even back East, and out here it's a fortune."

"You could hire a gun for fifty dollars," Ben observed, unconsciously shifting the holster on his hip.

"Not one like you, though. Not one like you. I want the best and I pay for the best. A thousand bucks if the deputy is dead by sundown."

Ben Snow got slowly to his feet and walked over to the desk. Without seeming to change his expression he shot out a lightning fist and caught Len on the tip of his jaw. He staggered backward, crashing into the wall behind him. "What the hell!" His hand automatically shot toward the desk drawer, but Ben already had dropped the lightning right hand to his own gun.

"You've got me confused with someone else, Mr. Antioch. I'm not a hired killer. Remember that."

Then he turned and was gone, and Len stared after him with hatred in his eyes . . .

For Ben Snow it was a town like many others, and Frontier Street

was a path that seemed to lead through the center of his life. The story was always the same, wherever he went. Always it started with the rumors, then the whispered tales, finally the open accusations. On Frontier Street it was no different. He remembered all the men he'd half-killed with his fists when they said those familiar words. And the few he'd brought down with his Colt when all else failed.

He went into the little lunch room across the muddy street from the Golden Swan, sat down at a soiled wooden table and signalled Gus for the usual. Old Gus sometimes seemed like the only real friend he had in town. The only male one, at least.

"Hello, Ben. How's things today?" Gus had been a gold prospector some time, years before, until an Indian arrow lost him his left arm. Now he cooked food, such as it was, for the cowhands who wandered into town.

"Great, Gus. Busy?"

"Two people all morning. Nobody eats any more."

Ben was just clearing his throat for an answer when the door swung open behind him. He never liked to sit with his back to the door and now he turned quickly to face the newcomer. It was the deputy, Reilly, the man Antioch wanted killed.

He was a handsome young man with features deeply tanned by years under the desert sun. A dark scar on one cheek was the only blemish, and even this could be overlooked in a town like Frontier. A much more important blemish on Reilly was one not quite visible. He was an honest man who took his job seriously.

"You're Ben Snow, aren't you?" he asked quietly.

"That's the name."

"You were just talkin' with Len Antioch."

Ben's muscles tensed. "You get around." He watched the light glisten off the deputy's badge, saw his hand dropping toward his gun.

"Draw, Snow! I know who you are," he shouted suddenly, crouching into a gunfighter's squat.

But he was too close, and Ben was too fast. Gus screamed a warning from behind the counter, and that was all the distraction he needed. His big fist smashed into the side of Reilly's head, sending the deputy sprawling. His boot came down on the man's gun hand and the fight was over as quickly as it started. He put his lips close to Reilly's ear as he yanked him back to his feet.

"Listen, dope—I didn't take Antioch's money. I'm not going to kill you or anyone else if I can help it. Now leave me the hell alone."

He pushed the deputy back into a chair and headed for the door, tossing Gus a quarter for the lunch he never got. There was no peace anywhere on Frontier Street today.

Maybe in Cathy Norris's dress shop, he decided suddenly, crossing the street once more. It should be quiet there.

Cathy was older than Ben—almost thirty-five, he guessed—but she had a certain youth about her that went well with her middle-aged business sense. He liked Cathy, liked her better than any of the other girls he'd met during these months in Frontier. She ran a dress shop just down the street from the Golden Swan, a shop that annually imported the latest New York and San Francisco fashions for quick sale to the forty or fifty females young enough and rich enough to still care about their clothes.

Cathy had come West with her mother and father ten years earlier, and like so many others they'd met the Utes in the Colorado Mountains. She'd wakened screaming one morning as the arrows rained down upon them, and when it was all over she found her father's body outside the wagon. The Indians had carried off her mother but somehow missed her. The experience would have broken most girls in their mid-twenties, but Cathy had survived it with only a touch of hardness and cynicism to show for that day. She'd told Ben the story almost the first time they'd met, as if proud of the tragedy.

"Well," she greeted him with the usual smile, "what's the good news this morning, Ben? Come to buy a dress?"

"The news is all bad. I've been up an hour and I've already used my fists on two men."

"Not the sheriff, I hope," she said, going on about the business of arranging a great fluffy dress for display.

"Just as bad. His deputy, Reilly."

"No!"

"And Len Antioch, too."

"Are you crazy, Ben? If Reilly doesn't lock you up, Len will probably shoot you."

He dropped into a chair and rubbed his forehead with a leathery hand. "It's always the same, in every town."

"You know what they say about you?" she asked, her voice suddenly low.

"I know what they say. I've listened to the same whispers for nine years now."

The door of Cathy's shop swung open and Sheriff Vic Pedley strolled in, his iron-gray mustache glistening with tiny drops of sweat, "What's this all about, Snow?" he asked without preliminaries, in the familiar slow voice of an old lawman. "You slugged my deputy over at Gus's place."

"It was one of those things, Sheriff. He went for his gun without any cause."

"Says he had cause. Says you're workin' for Len Antioch and his brother now."

Ben looked the sheriff up and

down, watching for any move that would signal a sudden drawing of his gun. But there was none—the lawman apparently wanted only to talk. "It's not true, Sheriff. I had conversation with Antioch, but that's all. I don't work for gamblers."

"Then suppose you tell me just who you really are. You rode into town two months back without a word, and you've just been around ever since. You don't work at any of the ranches, and you don't work for Antioch. What do you do?"

"I'm on my way to California," Ben answered. "Just stopping over in Frontier."

"On your way from where? New Mexico?"

Ben's body tensed. "I've been there. Years ago."

"Nine years ago?" Sheriff Pedley's hand was poised over his gun as he spoke.

"Let's all get some coffee," Cathy suggested, brushing quickly between them. "Let's go over to Gus's and have some coffee."

The tension eased for an instant and Ben relaxed. He didn't want trouble in front of the girl, and apparently neither did the sheriff. But before anyone could make a move for the door it opened once more, to admit a breathless Deputy Reilly.

"Quick," he gasped out. "Someone's killed Len Antioch . . ."

Someone had indeed killed Len Antioch, and already Frontier Street was alive with the news. Men on horseback rode shouting past, and from all directions came running people converging on the Golden Swan. It was as if the President had died.

"Everyone out," the sheriff was shouting to Reilly. "Clear everyone out of here. Give us room to breath."

"That means you too," Reilly said, pushing Ben back through the office door. Beyond, in back of the big old desk, Ben caught a glimpse of a bloody head and hand stretched out across the floor.

He walked back across the muddy street, against the rush of people, and collared Gus on the opposite side. "I need some coffee and food. How about it?"

"Sure, sure. Did you see him? Did you see Len's body? Who killed him?"

"They don't know yet. It looked to me like someone had beaten him over the head with a pistol butt."

Old Gus snorted, opening the door with his one good arm. "Probably that no-good brother of his done it. You know Harry?"

"Seen him around," Ben mumbled, deep in thought.

He drank his coffee in silence, and it was twenty minutes later when the sheriff joined him at the table. "Got a few questions to ask you, Snow."

"Go ahead."

Pedley's face was grim. "What did you and Len talk about this morning?"

"He offered me a thousand dollars to kill Reilly," Ben answered honestly.

"You accepted?"

"No, I hit him and knocked him down and left. I'm not a hired killer, whatever you and everyone else might think."

Pedley's eyes narrowed. "You say you knocked him down . . ."

"He was alive when I left him, if that's what you're wondering. I hit him with my fist, not with a gun butt."

The sheriff played with his mustache. "I'm going over to talk with Len's brother, Harry. Maybe you'd better come along."

"If you say so." He paid Gus for the food and followed the sheriff back across the street. The crowd was breaking up now, reforming itself into little groups of three or four to talk over the situation, to guess and speculate and wonder. And Ben noticed a good many of their eyes on him as he crossed the width of Frontier Street.

Deputy Reilly was in the little back office with Harry Antioch, but the body was gone now—bound no doubt for the undertaker at the end of the street and then on up to the graveyard on the hill. Reilly lounged in a corner chair, rolling a cigarette. Harry, looking gray and worried, sat behind his brother's desk.

"Well, Harry," the Sheriff asked, "what's the story?"

Harry Antioch turned steely eyes on Ben. "This is the guy that killed my brother," he said quietly. "Everyone knows who he is."

"He denies it, Harry. And his story's pretty convincing. Claims Len tried to hire him to kill Reilly, my deputy."

Reilly got to his feet at the mention of his name. "I knew that's what it was. And I figure this guy would do it, too. I was givin' the Antioch brothers too much trouble lately. They had to get rid of me."

But now Harry was on his feet too. "Why in hell don't you guys all go back to punching cows? My brother and I weren't hurting anyone. We run honest games for the boys, with never no trouble. Everybody was happy till Reilly became a deputy and this guy Snow rode into town."

"Did you see anyone else come in here after Ben Snow left?"

"No, but there's a back door. Snow or Reilly might have returned that way and killed my brother."

"Why?" Pedley asked, shifting the gun on his hip. "Why should anyone want to kill Len if you were running an honest game?"

"Why did anyone want to shoot Lincoln? Even a guy like my brother probably made enemies. There are a lot of hired guns around this town," he said, shooting a knowing glance to Ben.

"But Len wasn't shot," the Sheriff pointed out. "He got knocked on the head a few times. That's hardly the work of a professional killer."

"That's more a brotherly sort of crime," Ben observed. "Like Cain and Abel."

"Like who?" Harry asked, missing the implication.

But Sheriff Pedley was still more interested in Ben. "You make an awfully good suspect, Snow, whatever you say. You might have killed him before you left, or you might have come back here later."

"You goin' to arrest me, Sheriff?"

"I just might."

"Well, you know where to find me," he said. "I'm goin' now."

"Where'll you be?"

"Cathy's dress shop, probably. Look there first." He could feel their eyes on him as he walked out the rear door and around to the street again.

The sky above was clouding up again, and it looked like there might be more rain on the way. He cursed the recent mud on his boots, collected from behind the Golden Swan, and wondered when Arizona ever had all the dry weather he heard about. Certainly it was wet enough this month.

"Hello again, stranger," Cathy said. "The Sheriff make an arrest yet?"

"If he had I wouldn't be here. I'm still the prime suspect."

She looked away from him, making an obvious effort to avoid his eyes. "Ben . . ."

"Yeah?"

"This . . . story they tell about you . . . Is it true?"

"You too, huh? You believe it too."

"Not really, Ben," she answered, starting to unpack another dress. "You like this one? It came in this morning from New York."

"It's fine. You believe it, don't you?"

She looked down at him in the chair, at the holstered gun hanging loosely at his side—the gun she'd never known him to draw. "Are you?" she whispered. "Are you Billy the Kid?"

He sighed and looked away. "Billy the Kid's been dead for nine years. Everybody knows that."

"There was a man . . . he rode into town a few weeks after you arrived. He knew Billy, back in New Mexico. He swore you looked just like him, just like he would look at the age of thirty . . ."

"My name's Ben Snow," he answered quietly. "I'm from New Mexico, but that's as far as it goes."

"But this man was so certain. He . . . he said he ran into you in Denver a few months back. Said you shot it out with two of the best shots in the state and killed them both. He said you handled a gun just like Billy the Kid used to."

"I know. I've heard all the stories a thousand times and that's why I keep moving on."

"Did you kill those two men up in Denver?"

"They hated each other as much as they hated me. They were so busy trying to kill each other that I managed a couple of lucky shots."

"And where was it before Denver?"

"Before Denver? With the army at Wounded Knee. Slaughtering Indians."

"And before that? Nine years ago?"

"You really believe it, don't you? What do you think I am, a ghost?"

"No, you're human, Ben Snow. All too human at times. But there are always stories. Some say Billy the Kid never died that night nine years ago in the girl's bedroom."

Ben nodded. "And stories like that have been the curse of my life. That's why I never draw my gun if I can help it. That's why I use my fists."

"Did he . . . really look like you?"

"So they say. And when people saw how I could shoot the story just naturally got started. This year has been worse than most. The territory seems full of men who knew Billy personally."

She came over to him as he stood up, and she said, "I believe you, really, but you haven't actually told me anything. You still could be . . . him."

"I could be."

"A man like Billy the Kid might have killed Len Antioch under certain circumstances."

"He might have."

"Why don't you leave, Ben? Why don't you get your horse and ride out of Frontier?"

"Because then the sheriff would know he was right. They'd come after me, and if they didn't find me there'd be another story to follow me to the next place."

"So what are you going to do?"

"Well, right now I think I'll try to get back inside the Antioch brothers' office and have a look around. There might be all sorts of interesting things around."

"If it's Harry Antioch, he'll kill you," she said simply.

"I've had men shoot at me before," he told her. "See you later."

He went back into the street, under clouds leaden with the threat of rain. A passing horseman spattered mud on his pants, and in some towns that would have been a shooting offense. Things were a bit more friendly in Frontier, though. He'd not heard a gunshot during the two months he'd been there. Pistol butts made quieter weapons.

Reilly, the deputy, was standing by the alley door to the Golden Swan, checking the bullets in his revolver. "Thinkin' of shooting somebody, Reilly?" he asked.

"Maybe you, wise guy. It would give me quite a name if I gunned down Billy the . . ."

"Name's Ben Snow. Remember that. Now step aside while I go in."

"I'm here to keep people out, mister."

"Go tell your boss I'm inside, then." Ben pushed past him and entered the office. Reilly followed right behind him, hand on gun.

Ben wasted no time. He'd dealt with gamblers wiser and older than the Antioch brothers many times, and he knew just where to find what he sought. A quick look through the three regular desk drawers yielded nothing, and he pulled the gun from his holster.

"I'm ahead of you," Reilly said, drawing his own weapon in a flash.

"Don't worry, I've never fired since I got here, have I? It's just that I happen to know this desk. I saw one just like it in Kansas City once. Look here." And with a quick motion of his gun he smashed into one of the ornate panels that ran along the side of the massive desk.

"What in hell you doin', Snow?"

"Here, unless I'm all wet, are the books and records for Len and Harry's gambling activities in this town. You run and tell Sheriff Pedley I've found them."

Reilly hesitated only another moment. "He won't like your being here."

"He'll like it a hell of a lot less if you don't tell him right away."

With that the deputy was gone, his gun back in the holster. And Ben was flipping through the pages of the first big ledger he'd taken from the secret drawer. There were pages covered with notations and brief abbreviations, and one especially kept appearing more than the others.

And then, in the half-second his eyes were off the other door—the door to the bar—it opened, and Harry Antioch was with him in the room. As swiftly as a trapped fox his hand had gone for the little Derringer under his arm. "Hold it right there, Snow."

"Well! This is a pleasure."

"Drop the gun on the floor. Quick! You might be a fast shot, but you're not that fast."

"I know everything, Harry. It's all here in the books."

He twisted his upper lip into a sneer. "Then you'll have to die, won't you?"

Ben was still hanging onto the gun, pointed at the floor, hoping for the chance, the split-second he needed. And then the back door opened, and Deputy Reilly came hurrying in.

"The Sheriff says—" He saw Harry Antioch and the gun just an instant too late. He clawed at his own holster in a sudden reflex motion, but Harry was much too fast. He whirled and the tiny Derringer coughed once and Reilly fell backwards, blood spurting from his right eye.

Ben knew it was now or never, knew he'd already waited a second too long. He started to bring the gun up, mentally gauging the an-

gle as he had a thousand times before. But Harry Antioch had dropped his gun arm to his side. He stood staring at the fallen body as if he'd never seen one before. "I didn't mean to kill him," he mumbled.

Ben held the gun steady, but he did not fire. He couldn't kill this man now. Perhaps later, but not now. "He was just an eager kid deputy, Harry," Ben said quietly. "He didn't have to die."

"Now what do I do?" he asked, half to himself.

Ben motioned with his gun. "I'll give you a five-second head start Harry. Then I'm coming after you."

Harry Antioch looked deep into his eyes—and saw that he meant it. He opened the door behind him and went out, fast. Ben counted five and then went after him.

Harry was behind the bar, shoving cartridges into a shiny silver revolver. He dropped down out of sight as Ben appeared in the doorway. "We can make a deal, Snow," he shouted. "I'll cut you in."

Ben glanced around to make sure no one was there to take a stray accidental bullet in the stomach. But the Golden Swan was closed to customers. Through the front window he could see only Sheriff Vic Pedley hurrying out of his office down the street. That gave him maybe a minute at most.

"A deal, Snow! This town has enough for both of us."

"What about Pedley?" Ben asked quietly.

"I'll handle him."

"No go, Harry."

"Then die, damn you!" Harry Antioch shouted. He fired once, wildly, over the top of the bar. Ben knew he could have taken him without firing a shot, but the memory of the dead deputy in the next room was still too fresh in his mind.

He dropped to one knee and carefully fired five shots into the wood of the bar, just about where Harry's head had appeared. There was a choking scream, and cough, and then Harry Antioch's head rose above the bar again. Ben could see he was hurt badly.

"Damn," he coughed. "Lucky shot . . . damned lucky."

"Drop the gun, Harry. Maybe the Doc can still save you."

But the gambler was on his way out, on his way to join his brother. "Tell . . . me one thing, Snow . . . Are you really Billy . . . Billy the Kid . . . ?"

Ben looked at him with sadness and silence in his eyes. He took a step toward the tottering man, but already it was too late. Harry Antioch was dead on his feet, just as Sheriff Pedley came through the swinging doors . . .

Later, they were sitting around in Gus's place, eating lunch—Ben and Cathy and Sheriff Pedley. The sheriff was frowning into his soup,

perhaps thinking of his dead deputy, and of the three bodies that would travel up to the graveyard on the hill.

"So Antioch killed his brother, huh?" he said, as if seeking confirmation in his own mind.

Ben looked at Cathy, grim and silent with her food, and somehow he hated himself for what he had to do. It would have been so easy just to let things go.

"No, I don't think so, Sheriff," he answered, looking away.

"You don't think so? What in hell you mean?"

"Harry Antioch was a gambler, but not a killer. You didn't see his expression when he gunned down Reilly, but I did. I think that was the first man he ever really killed in his whole life. He certainly didn't kill his brother."

"Well, hell, then who did?"

Ben's eyes came back slowly to meet and lock with Pedley's. "I think you did, Sheriff . . ."

"What the hell!"

Behind him, Ben heard Cathy gasp. "I found their secret set of books, Sheriff. They showed large payments to you from the gambling. You were apparently a secret partner in the Golden Swan right from the beginning."

"Maybe I was. That doesn't make me a killer."

"No, but a lot of other things do. Len tried to hire me to kill Reilly, but he didn't seem at all concerned about you. I suppose he figured he could always keep you in line. But you two battled about something—maybe about your deputy—and you bashed his head in with your gun. Afterwards, you made the mistake of mentioning that he'd been hit over the head several times—a fact you could hardly have told from the condition of his skull. Maybe some of them big eastern docs could have counted the number of blows, but not you, Sheriff—unless you were there."

"No jury will believe that, Snow."

"There's more. I'm willing to bet the mud on your boots is a perfect match for the mud by Len's back door . . ."

"I walk that way lots of times. So what?"

"And before he died, Harry said he could take care of you and apparently keep you from bothering him. What do you think he meant by that? Blackmail, probably, because he figured you for his brother's killer."

The sheriff twisted his mustache with nervous fingers. "There's no proof there. No proof for a jury."

"What about the books?"

"Things are like that in Arizona. You think the people will send me to prison because I had an interest in a gambling house and bar?"

"We could try it."

But the sheriff had one more trump card. "They'd as soon lynch you right now, if I let the word get around that you killed the An-

tioch brothers and my deputy. They're already convinced you're some sort of ghost of Billy the Kid, and folks in these parts don't like things they can't understand."

"So where does that leave us?"

"You get out of town by tomorrow and we call it a draw. The girl goes with you because she knows too much." Cathy gasped at this, and turned toward Ben.

"I'm not in this," she said. "I've got a business on Frontier Street, a good business. I'm not going anywhere."

Sheriff Pedley shrugged. "There's no other possibility, is there?"

"I can think of one," Ben said quietly. "You get out of town and sign a paper before you go turning over the Golden Swan to me. You're the sole owner now, you know."

Pedley laughed out loud. "Give it to you? *Give it to you?*"

"That's right."

"You think I'm out of my head?"

"Then where are we, Sheriff?"

"You leave."

Ben frowned at his coffee. "If I don't?"

"I shoot you and say you killed them all. Maybe I shoot the girl for good measure too." He kept his voice low, so that the words didn't carry to the counter where Gus was working.

Ben sighed finally and stood up. "If that has to be the answer, let's settle it now. Outside. In the street."

"Oh, no. You're a gunman. I wouldn't stand a chance against . . . Billy the Kid."

Ben took out his Colt and laid it on the table. "There's one live cartridge left in here. I used the other five on Harry. You can check that."

Pedley frowned in hesitation, then checked the cylinder of the gun. "OK, so what?"

"I'll spin the cylinder, so I don't know where the live cartridge is. Then we'll draw at the same time. I'll have to pull the trigger from one to six times to get off my shot. That should give you all the advantage you'll need."

Pedley was beginning to smile, for the first time that day. "Sounds fair enough," he said. "Of course, you know even if you kill me the townsfolks would never let you leave alive. They'd pounce on you and tear you apart before my body hit the ground."

"That's the chance I'll take," Ben said. "Outside, in five minutes?"

Sheriff Pedley nodded. "Five minutes. Right out in front."

He got up slowly and went out into the street to wait, and Cathy's hand came out to grip Ben's arm. "You fool! What kind of a fight is that? You'll get off maybe one shot before he fires. The odds are five to one against you."

"Maybe," Ben said. "Wish me luck."

"You crazy fool," was all she could say.

He waited another moment,

then holstered his gun and got up. Outside, a cool breeze was blowing down Frontier Street, and Sheriff Vic Pedley stood alone in front of the Golden Swan.

"Here I am, Snow."

"I see you."

"Spin the cylinder."

Ben carefully took out the gun, held it pointed toward the sky, and twirled the magazine with its single cartridge. One out of six. Then he dropped the weapon back in his holster.

"Count of ten, Sheriff?"

"Count of ten's OK."

Ben started to count. "One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . six . . "

And Pedley joined him for the last four numbers. ". . . seven . . . eight . . . nine . . ."

A pause, ever so slight.

". . . ten . . ."

Ben's gun was out of the holster before the final word had left his mouth. His finger was squeezing at the trigger.

Once.

Twice.

Pedley's gun was coming fast, his eyes glistening like a tiger's.

Ben's finger tightened a third time and got only a click.

Pedley smiled and paused a split-second for a careful aim.

And Ben's gun roared on the fourth try.

Pedley spun around with the bullet's impact and went down in the dust, and his finger jerked spasmodically on the trigger. Then he was dead.

Ben sighed and holstered his gun. He didn't look at the sheriff again, but walked away instead, back toward the doorway where Cathy waited.

"Ben! How . . . ?"

"I've done it before, back in New Mexico," he said quietly. "I can always get off five before the other man fires, so really the odds are on my side. They always take their time because they figure they've got me."

"Oh God, Ben!"

"Pedley was wrong about one thing, though. These people don't care whether he's dead or alive." He motioned toward the body, where a crowd of quiet people was collecting.

"You'll be leaving now, Ben?"

"I might as well. Let someone else fight over the Golden Swan."

"Ben . . . you are a gunfighter, aren't you?"

"You might say that."

Her voice dropped to a quiet whisper. "Are you . . . Billy the Kid?"

"Was anybody?" he answered. "Was he ever just one man, or was he just a collection of legends?"

"Are you?"

"Ben Snow's the name," he answered with a smile. "Remember that."

And presently he rode away from the town called Frontier, and all was at peace once more . . .

(Continued from other side)

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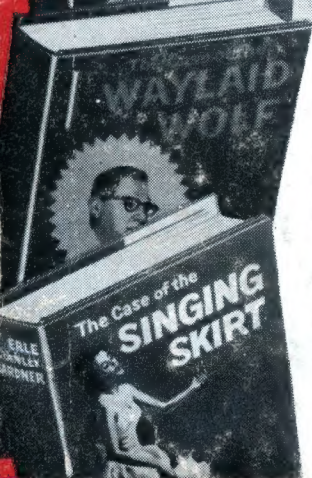

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